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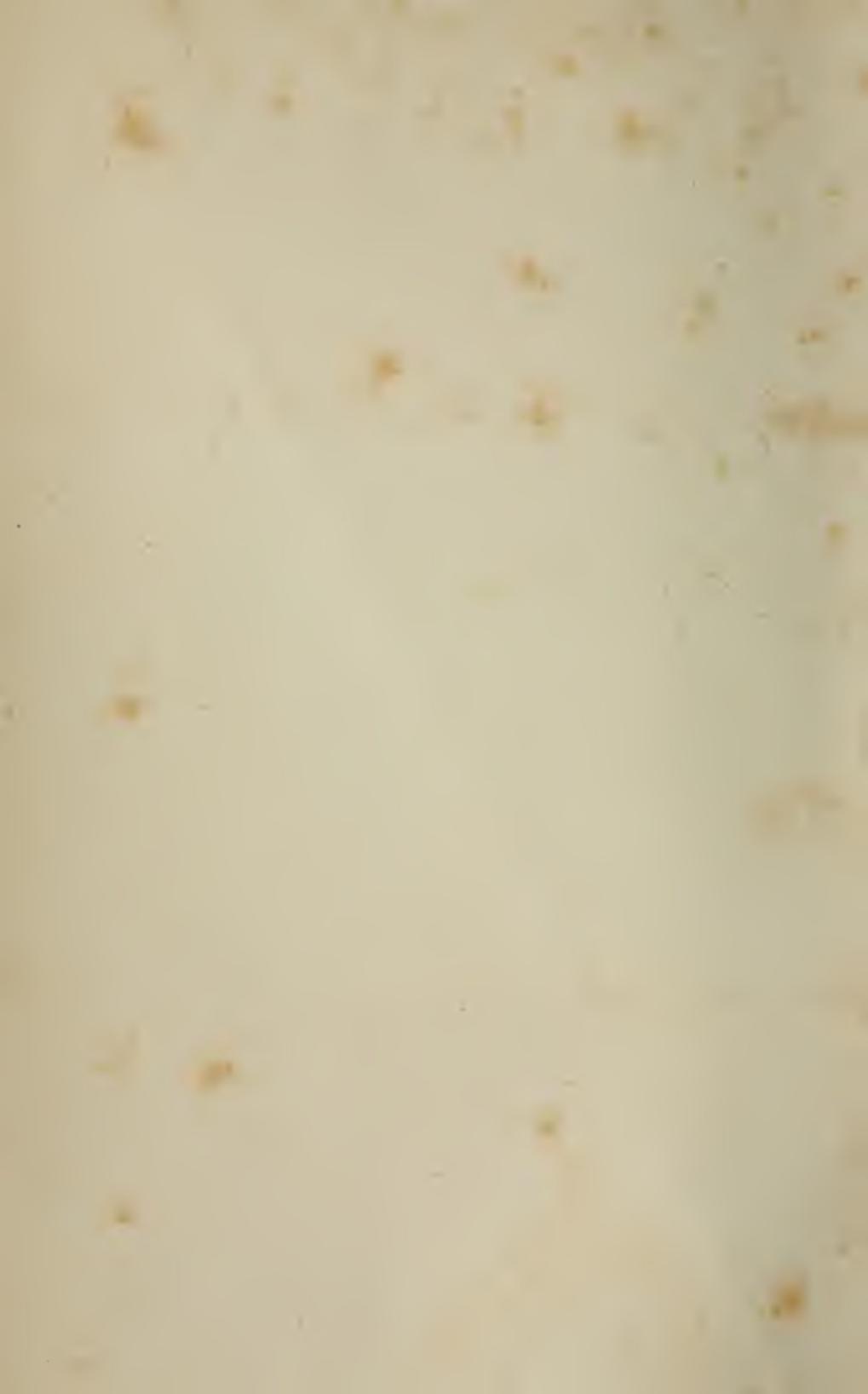
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FLIRTS AND FLIRTS;

OR,

A SEASON AT RYDE.

“ Life is but a Rotundorum,
We care nothing how it goes;
Let them prate about decorum,
Who have characters to lose.”

OLD GIPSY SONG.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



LONDON:

RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

1868.

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FLIRTS AND FLIRTS.

CHAPTER I.

THE TOWN REGATTA.

THAT night after the ball, Sandy Beaumont and Count Manfredi and four or five other men sat up in the coffee-room of the hotel they all put up at, smoking; drinking of course, too, but not to any extent to speak of, for they were none of them men who took much pleasure in drinking, and as they sat there, thus engaged, as may be supposed, they talked also.

“A precious bad hat Lady Long is looking out for a son-in-law!” remarked one of the men.

"She is fond of calculating," said another, "and I daresay she has a rough estimate of how many wild oats a fellow can sow, and thinks he must reform soon. Swell girl that Miss Long, but a bit of a temper I should say."

"Yes, Teddy knocks under to her, don't he?" said Sandy. "He is a better fellow than I took him for though. He would not look at that brute Simpson, tonight."

"This poor Mr. Simpson! what has he done to be such a brute?" asked Count Manfredi, who now owned to understanding English, though he never spoke it.

"Ugh!" said one of the party, "he has done about all a brute can do, and he is carried off to his yacht now oftener dead drunk than not. That wretched girl threatens to leave him, I believe, if he don't do something to amuse her. She says he leaves her there alone all day, and

only goes off at night to suffer from blue devils."

"I daresay he ill-treats her horribly," said Sandy.

"Not he," said the other, "he is as frightened of her as can be. She blows him up sky-high, when she chooses, and she is as jealous and fierce as a tiger. Miss Long had better look out before she accepts him. I should not sleep easy at night with that Mlle. Flore for my enemy."

"Miss Long will never accept him," said the Count. "Can you not see with one eye that he cares for some one else? But you find great fault with this Mr. Simpson, and yet what has he done, but amuse himself as we all do?"

"Some have better ways of amusing themselves than others," said Sandy, still glowing with the idea he knew the Count had intended to imply, that it was Kathleen, not Miss Long, whom

Mr. Simpson would be likely to offer to.

“*Peut-être,*” said the Count, “but this man has ruined no honest man’s happiness, nor honest girl’s either. What honest girl could care for such a man as he is?” and the Count laid such a stress on the word “honest,” and gave such a glance at Sandy as he spoke, as made the other’s flesh creep.

“I knew a man once who was quite different. Pardon me, my good Mr. Beaumont, if I say that in face he was like you, in character of course he was quite different. He came across a beautiful young woman, who was not quite so happy with her husband as she might soon have been, and he poisoned her mind with vile stories about her husband, who all the time lived but to get her pleasure; and because she had once loved this husband so much as to leave her parents for his sake, he persuaded her

that it was her duty—duty! *mon Dieu!* to leave him now for them, and he offered himself as an escort for the difficulties of the journey, knowing that she was ignorant of the world, and would not see how she would thus compromise herself; and then having got her into his power by taking her back to her parents, who long ago had forgiven her desertion of them, he made their life a burden to them, as that of her husband was already to him, urging her, till she went away with him again; and he took her away from the rich home of her youth with as little remorse as he had before lured her from that of her husband, and then he made her life too a burden to her, spending all the little money she had, and neglecting her for others, till it was a happiness for her when he died. He made four people miserable at least, who but for him might have lived happy, respected and respecting one another, and by doing so he obtained the money, which otherwise he

would never have had the wits to gain, to supply his own selfish gratifications—just such as your Mr. Simpson enjoys. I call *him* a brute now."

"Did he love the woman?" asked Sandy.

"If you loved a woman would you make her life a misery to her, tear her from all the love she had ever known, and with her money make love to others?" asked the Count, looking straight at him with large dilated eyes.

"He was a villain, not only a brute," cried Sandy, getting up from his chair as he spoke, and walking restlessly about the room.

"*Eh, mon Dieu ! comme vous lui ressemblez,*" said the Count, who had got up too, and standing now, leaning on the back of his chair, with his keen eyes fixed on Sandy, spoke as if the resemblance was so strong, it forced the words from him.

"What the devil do you mean by that?" asked Sandy; but the Count with a nonchalant bow, and "*Bon soir*" to the assembled company, had gone out of the room, leaving him to wonder whether this likeness at all accounted for the Count's evident dislike of himself, or whether it was simply invented to insult him. He rather inclined to the latter belief, but then what could make it worth the Italian's while to resort to so far fetched a manner of doing so.

The next day was the town Regatta again, and a still greater mob on the pier than even on the first day. Mr. Simpson had taken the precaution of engaging a large boat to lie off and look on from, and had invited several of his acquaintance to share its comparative seclusion. The Longs were there of course, and Lady Killowen and Kathleen, and Sandy Beaumont, and De Veux, and one or two more men, and there was a good deal of chaff

about sherry and soda, and a moderate amount of drinking of it, and Kathleen was very fast in her talk and so was her mother; the two between them quite monopolising the attention of the men, and considerably scandalising Lady Long and her daughter, who secretly resolved that they would never trust themselves in such dangerous society again.

In spite of the publicity of the situation, Kathleen let her golden plaits fall down. "She contrived that they should do so," Lady Long said, and she took no notice when De Veux, sitting close behind her, pulled them to pieces and played with them; and she bet one golden lock with Mr. Simpson against the duck winning in the pole dance, he being conspicuous on the greasy pole by his enormous chignon and harlequin get-up. If the duck failed, Mr. Simpson was to give her one of the new feather parasols which were so charming, being equally available or non-available

as fans or parasols, and when the duck did not get the pig, as indeed the chances were against his doing, and Kathleen said triumphantly :

“Now I shall be able to sport my fine new parasol at the band to-morrow, and shan’t I be a swell? there is not one going about Ryde yet.” Lady Killowen called out: “But don’t be stingy, Kathleen, let him have a bit of your hair all the same. I am sure you have got enough to spare him some.”

“That is right, Lady Killowen,” said De Veux, “I am sure she might let us each have a bit. Where are the scissors?”

“Here you are,” cried Teddy Long. “Always carry them about with me, in case any girl should lose her heart to me. They’re for ever doing it, the little dears. It is a pity I have only one to give them in return. Mine is all in little bits as it is; I say, Simpson, give us the sherry.”

"You must cut it off yourself, Miss O'Grady."

"I'll be—be—be shaved if I do, I think," said Kathleen, laughing, as she only knew how to laugh. Oh, what bad style the Longs had voted that laugh by this time! Not Teddy though. He had refreshed himself with the sherry and was up to anything now.

"By Jove, I'll be hair cutter; it is my vocation. Now, Miss O'Grady, which lock is to come off first? Here give us the scissors, old fellow."

There sat Kathleen in the middle of the boat, still laughing that gurgling laugh so overflowing with merriment, that it required all the stoniness of a Long not to be moved by it; before her knelt Teddy trying to snatch the scissors from De Veux, who was sitting close behind her, one hand still gently playing with her hair, the other holding the scissors aloft. Mr. Simpson was holding an umbrella over her

to shield her from the sun, whilst Sandy had only retired from his position near her to inquire the name of the real winner of the pig for her.

“I’ll have it engraved on my parasol,” Kathleen had said, and meanwhile Lady Killowen was urging the men on, and bidding her daughter not to be so prudish. “I’ll cut it all off if you like, mother,” said Kathleen mischievously, while a chorus of “No no,” rose from everybody.

“Only the least little bit in the world I’ll be satisfied with,” said De Veux.

“No one is to have more than a single hair,” cried Teddy. “As to Simpson, he is such a desperate lady-killer, that he has a pillow stuffed with lady’s hair as it is, so he shan’t have any.”

“No, by Jove, that is not fair,” said the heavy yachtsman, “you’ll cut off a bit for me, won’t you, Miss O’Grady?”

“No, you must take the responsibility

on yourself, if you want any. I won't be answerable to my maid for what damage you may do. But we are rather astonishing the minds of the natives, I think. Sandy, you must plait it up for me. You are always a capital lady's maid. There is a wretch looking at us through double glasses. Make haste, do."

"Coming, ma'am, coming. Oh, but that is what a waiter at an hotel says, I forgot I was a lady's maid," said Sandy coming forward, and showing by the manner in which he set about it, that it was not the first time he had the honour of 'doing' his fair cousin's hair. But before it was plaited, Kathleen herself had cut off one long shining lock, which was quickly divided among the applicants; and then when the plaits were to be finally adjusted, there were many cries as to how Sandy was running the hair-pins into her head, and was not to be trusted with such a delicate operation, and Mr. Simpson was

requested to perform, and was so frightened of hurting her that he did not put the hair-pins in at all, and then Kathleen appealed to Miss Long, saying she saw men hair-dressers were "no go," and that young lady was so long in taking off her tight fitting gloves, that before she was ready her brother had already possessed himself of the hair-pins, and fastened up the long plaits in a style which, if perhaps still a trifle *dégradé*, was nevertheless eminently becoming, as everyone was obliged to acknowledge; and Teddy was so immensely elated, that, as he said himself, he "walked upon air," which perhaps accounted for his nearly tumbling into the water as he tried to help Kathleen on shore, an office which she graciously allotted to him in return for the hair dressing.

"I'm in love, I'm in love," was the burden of Teddy's song to all his acquaintance whom he met on the pier that evening, for he did not go home like the

others of Mr. Simpson's party, but walked to the end to show himself and try for an appetite for dinner. "And I've fastened up my charmer's hair, and I walk upon air."

"Is that along of the sherry, Teddy?"

"Oh, that was glorious. I have been drinking all the afternoon, and eating all the morning; and now we have got to feed at seven sharp to get down to the club to see the fireworks, and after that I am going to the theatre, but not to lose my heart to the Ensign on the Loose, for I'm in love, I'm in love—and after that, old fellow, we'll have a bottle of champagne together, and you may tell the waiter to put it down to your account, for I am not very flush at present. Must not keep my lady-mother waiting, so ta ta, see you again soon."

"What a fool that fellow is!" said young Thompson, a native of Ryde, who had known Teddy as long as he could

remember, and had no patience with him.

“ He always gets a dinner out of me,” said Cosmo Beauclerc, whom Teddy had spoken to, “ too bad, isn’t it, Miss Sedley ? This champagne to-night won’t count, too, I suppose. The other day he hailed me in a hansom in Piccadilly, jumped in, ‘ How are you, old fellow ? just met you in the nick of time, coming to dine with you to-night. Now where shall it be, Long’s or the Clarendon ? you can choose, I don’t care ; bless you, I am not at all particular.’ Then directly after dinner up he jumped, ‘ Thunder and lightning ! how late it is, my lady-love will be thinking me faithless, see you again at Ryde, ta ta,’ and off he went, leaving me to settle the bill. A great shame, was it not ?”

“ Yes, indeed ; I’d get a dinner out of him in exchange, if I were you.”

“ Don’t think I could. ’Pon honour I would if I could, but he is too quick for

me," said young Beauclerc, who, more like quicksilver himself than anything else, was besides the most extravagantly generous of subalterns, and would rather stand a dozen men a dinner, than get one out of one of them. "But Teddy and I are great friends, he'd be a capital fellow if it were not for his mother. Lady Long is so different, different days. Some days she is great friends with me, and other days, 'pon honour, I assure you, she don't seem to know me. Can't bear that kind of thing."

"Oh, no, that is horrid," said Miss Sedley, and so they talked on.

CHAPTER II.

AN EVENING'S WORK AT RYDE.

THE town Regatta finishes with fireworks, and on that occasion the R.V.Y. Club puts itself at the disposition of the ladies, and places seats for them in the spacious balcony already described on the occasion of the ball, and all round the little circular bit of ground, where tiny cannon guard the Victoria landing place. Lady Killowen and Kathleen were of course invited to go, and went under the escort of that convenient Sandy ; Lady Killowen still in capital spirits, Kathleen in that state of languid depression some people are subject to the night after a dance, and

which, in this particular case, was partly caused by the uncomfortable feeling that she had been a good deal faster that afternoon than she at all cared to be. On such occasions, Kathleen did not burst into those fits of weeping that so touch the hearts of the admirers of Kate Coventry, but she was generally tormented by a very unpleasant feeling of wishing “she hadn’t,” and wore a slightly sentimental air in consequence.

Feeling depressed this evening, all her first doubts the last night about the Count Manfredi came back to her with double force ; she had not seen him all day, now this evening she knew he would be at the Club, and she could not think how she should meet him. She told herself that she dreaded doing so, and would give worlds to avoid it ; but when they had seated themselves in the Club balcony, and the Count did not join them ; and when at last she distinguished him in the crowd,

but without being able to make out whom he was with, her desire to speak to him became intense. What pleasure could she have in the attentions of De Veux and Simpson? what pleasure could she have even in the knowledge that the Longs were furious because Mr. Simpson did not go to talk to them, when she was yet in this dreadful state of uncertainty about the Count? Sandy, she knew, was displeased with her; he had made no objection to their going out in the boat which Mr. Simpson had engaged to see the town sports from, only insisting on going himself also; but his cousin had easily seen he was much displeased with the manner in which she and her mother had conducted themselves there. He had said nothing about it, but he held himself aloof from his cousin, being more than usually attentive to Lady Killowen—though really she was the most guilty, as but for her, Kathleen would have been comparatively quiet,

and he abstained from any of those little jokes which were generally so natural to him.

So Kathleen had no resource but to listen to Messrs. De Veux and Simpson, and she listened to them, but she did not exert herself to be agreeable to them. One of her great charms was that her words and her laughter always seemed to flow so naturally from her ; when they did not come naturally, she did not exert herself to make them come by artificial means, so now she showed herself as pre-occupied as she felt. She would not have disliked sitting quite still watching the fireworks, which, though poor enough in themselves, were very pretty reflected in the sea and revealing the opposite coast, which, tame though it is, as coasts go, yet also looked very pretty under such favourable circumstances, showing also those few yachts that remained, with their knowing-looking masts and delicate tracery of rigging. In

between the fireworks it was not unpleasant, too, sitting there in the cool evening breeze, watching the twinkling reflections of the yachts' lights, and the bright comfortable looking row of Southsea lights in the distance; but it was simply boring to have to listen to those two men, who felt none of the poetry of the scene, to which Kathleen in her present depressed state was particularly open, and only abused the fireworks, and talked of the much better ones they had seen at Naples or those in London when the Princess of Wales arrived, and laughed at the time the "Brothers" kept, whom the Club had engaged to play for that night. They did play out of time—that was the worst of it, when once pointed out it could not be forgotten—but before she was told so, Kathleen, who was not very musical, had thought the plaintive melodies they played exactly suited to the scene. Anyhow they brought tears to her eyes, and she felt dis-

pleased with De Veux, who alternately laughed and exclaimed in horror at them. De Veux played the flute and went in for being a judge of music, and so this evening Kathleen thought even Mr. Simpson preferable, for he only went in for being a judge of wine.

Mr. Simpson was becoming one of her most devoted admirers now; her brilliant colouring had even shaken him in the time of his greatest fervour for Miss Zieri. But that light figurante style, as he described it, was what particularly attracted the heavy yachtsman, and if Miss Zieri would have had him, Miss O'Grady might have looked and longed for all he cared—to adopt his elegant phraseology again. But now that that little coquette had so heartlessly jilted him, he was desperate to show her how easily he could console himself, and could he but win the favour of the beauty of Ryde, that would be a triumph indeed. If he could do so before Miss

Zieri left Ryde, it would be perfect ; but unfortunately she was to start for Homberg early next morning. At one time he had been so maddened by his desire to show her how much others valued the prize she had despised, that, being conscious of the encouragement Miss Long, or to speak more correctly Lady Long, lavished upon him, he had thought to make his triumph secure by throwing himself and his thousands at the feet of that young lady, and had invited the party to the boat that afternoon with the intention of carrying out this design ; but that morning in the hotel coffee-room Miss Long's name had been somehow brought into the conversation, and though at first in no unfriendly spirit, simply praising her good dancing, yet after Mr. Simpson had given vent to one or two of his downright speeches in praise of her, the conversation had taken a turn, and somebody had told a story about some

man the Longs had just failed in catching, after trying desperately hard for him, and some one else had advised Simpson not to be too easily hooked.

“ You had better hook it first,” said one man with a guffaw at his own wit. “ You’ll hardly be a match for them if you stay on here, Simpson ; or rather you’ll be one with a vengeance,” and he laughed again.

Then Mr. Simpson had been very sulky at the idea that there should be anyone for whom he was not a match, and he had quite changed his mind about offering to Miss Long that afternoon. Such was the reputation which the Longs had gained for themselves, that it required but a straw to make those who were most their friends speak of them as match-making and manœuvring ; and without knowing what object he had in so doing, it would have required a far nicer observer than any of those then in the coffee-room, to see

that the Count Manfredi had cast that straw into the conversation. He had made up his mind that Mr. Simpson was the man of all others to make Sandy miserable, by taking his cousin for his own, and he did not care that anything should now interfere with his plans. Lady Long might look out for some other son-in-law; this one she was not to have. It was with a sort of savage pleasure that the Count gloated over the recollection of that garden scene of the night before. He had brought himself almost to consider the blasting of Sandy Beaumont's happiness as the chief object of his stay in England, even the carrying off of Ada Courteney had dwindled into being of secondary importance in his eyes, and if it was necessary to make Kathleen miserable also in order to accomplish his object, the Count did not shrink from it. He had besides a great contempt for women, and the doctrine of their passions

being in comparison with those of men “as moonlight unto sunlight, and as water unto wine,” found full acceptance with him.

It had been a surprise to him, on first meeting Kathleen again, to see how little she had ceased to care for him; he had expected to find some new object had quite taken his place, and only accounted for this not being the case by the idea, that during the time of mourning for her father, she had not had much opportunity of coming across any new object. For the Count was not a more than ordinarily conceited man, though at the very first seeing her again, he had so coolly said to himself “*elle m’adore.*”

He was only a clear-sighted man in such matters, and at the very first glance so much was clear to him. Now he felt that on the last night he had accomplished something, for he must have made it clear to Kathleen, that however much or

little he cared for her, he had the knowledge of how much she cared for him. Yes, however fast she might be, and English young ladies were, as the Count knew, fast—diabolically so, as he thought, only he thought it in French, which made it sound better; however fast she might be, she could not have received his last night's caress as she had done, unless it was really pleasing to her, and she would have no objection to its being but the first of a series.

Poor girl! flirt though the Count thought her, he felt that he had found the soft part of her heart, and pitied her accordingly, whilst he too watched the fireworks, and listened to those plaintive airs played so distressingly out of tune; for the Count's ear was perfect, and he required no De Veux to spoil his pleasure in them. He pitied Kathleen, but all the same he had that afternoon slipped a note into Mrs. Courteney's hand, full of

the most passionate protestations of love ; for the Count was never sparing of superlatives, and rather apt, woman's fashion, to be *abimé* and *comblé de joie* in the same sentence ; and this was a very particular letter for it was now some time since he had seen Mrs. Courteney, and he saw no chance yet of doing so again.

She was still on her good behaviour, and her husband was very devoted, taking her about every where that he could fancy she would care to go to, and never leaving her side for a moment. That afternoon he had brought her over to Ryde to watch the sports, or listen to the military band, according as she felt inclined, and it was whilst they were doing the latter, and he was standing on one side of her, that Count Manfredi passed by on the other, and slipped his note into her hand ; and by the manner in which Mrs Courteney carelessly dropped into her pocket, it was evidently not

the first note she had received in this way.

Now this evening as he stood below, and once and again looked up at Kathleen with De Veux and Simpson boring her ; for the lights of the room behind shone out into the balcony, and made it easy for him to distinguish the people there, though they could not distinguish the crowd below, it came back to him how, when he had first known her at Rome, he had thought how he might yet end his life happily, sharing its joys and sorrows with that young loving beauty. And then to think that this girl's father's sister had been wife to that Charlie Beaumont who had done him the cruellest injury that one man could do another ! and that the only weak point through which he could hope to touch his son was through the same girl, who would have tempted him to believe again in the possibility of a pure happy marriage, but for that vision-

ary Rosa of his early days still living in her villa on the Thames. No ; no such innocent pleasures for him—but rather should stormy love passages with Ada Courteney ease that heart, which Charlie and Rosa long ago had done to death for so many years. For during all those years, though he had had love affairs without end, the Count Manfredi's heart had never been even touched, till he had met with Kathleen O'Grady, glorious in her beauty and youthful enthusiasm ; and it had never been stirred till he met with Ada Courteney, with the same scornful beauty airs that the Rosa of old had worn.

It was strange that no idea of searching out that long lost Rosa ever presented itself to the Count's mind ; but, in truth, it never did occur to him to do so even for a moment, and had any man suggested it to him, he would have hated that man with almost as inveterate a hatred, as that

with which he now pursued the hitherto unconscious Sandy. But that last speech of the Count's the night before had opened Sandy's eyes somewhat; he had long fancied that the Count disliked him, why he could not guess, and that last speech last night made him certain of it. Could it have been a story in which the Count himself had played a part, that he had told them? But the Count had never been married. When he came to think of it however, Sandy felt so little sure about this, that he asked Lady Killowen whether it had been the case. It had been so completely forgotten by all the outer world, that though she had often heard him talked of apropos of his evident admiration of her daughter, she had never heard a mention of it; so when Sandy asked her, she said at once that it had never been the case, and wondered what should have put such an idea into his head. Then unless he had played one of the

principal parts in this story, Sandy did not see what part the Count could have played, so it did not account for his dislike of him, and he jumped to the conclusion that the story was a fabrication solely for the purpose of insulting himself.

It may seem strange that Sandy should never have heard of his father's carrying off the wife of an Italian Count; but, in truth, he hardly knew anything at all about his father. As soon as Lord Killowen's sister died, which, happily for her, was not long after her marriage, her family, though always kind to her boy, had been glad to hear as little as they could of her husband, who had already started on that course of going to the dogs, which he stuck to so persistently for the rest of his days. Neither was it in this form at all that the story ever reached them ; they only heard that Charlie had gone out of his way to do a piece of knight-errantry in bringing home to her parents an unfor-

tunate lady, whose husband ill used her, (Charlie's life had been most unusually full of such little adventures), and though at the time hearing who her father was, they never troubled themselves to hear the name of the cruel husband, nor in any way connected this hapless lady with the beautiful woman who was afterwards heard of as living with the poor good-for-nothing Charlie, and supporting him by her money, and whom, for some apparently inexplicable reason, he was said never to have married up to that day when he had got thrown, just as he was coming in winner for a larger pot of money than he had ever yet had the luck to gain. Poor Charlie Beaumont! he had been that sort of good fellow, whom no one who knew as an acquaintance could help liking, and yet no one who was brought into any nearer connexion with him could fail to repent of it. And so it came to pass that, when this seemingly good-hearted fellow died,

no one mourned for him, unless perhaps the young son on whom he had scarcely bestowed a thought since his birth.

Thus it was that Sandy knew nothing of his father's life, and the Count's story awoke in him no recollections of anything he had ever heard before, and he could see no meaning in it, telling as it did of a very villainous transaction, but yet not one so unparallelled in its villainy as to have any particular point, and then dragging in that resemblance also. It was a most uncalled for insult, and though he could think of no way of avenging it, he longed for an opportunity of telling the Count that he thought it such. That opportunity he had not long to wait for; as soon as the fireworks were over, every one met in the large room downstairs, where there were slight refreshments for such as wished for them, and where a few members of the Club were pressing people not to go away before the dance, which, as usual they

declared, was shortly to come off upstairs ; and whilst people were standing about waiting, the Count came into the room.

“Count, you insulted me last night,” said Sandy, without waiting a moment ; for if the Count Manfredi once got past him to speak to the ladies, he knew there could be no more calling him to account that evening.

“*Comment, mon cher !*” said the other, with his most thorough man-of-the-world air of indifference, standing motionless as if to give Sandy full time to explain.

“That story last night—that likeness—you only mentioned it with the intention of insulting me.”

“*Pardon*—the story was a true one ; the likeness striking—very striking,” he repeated, fixing the young man with a cold keen gaze. “Accidental, of course. I remarked, you remember, that the characters were different.” Then as Sandy seemed puzzled what further to object.

“Perhaps you will permit me to pass. I should wish to ask your cousin if she were fatigued by the ball,” and the Count went up to Kathleen, and as he asked this question, his manner was almost tender. “*Anima mia,*” he said. Kathleen knew he had no right to call her so, but it gave her a thrill of pleasure when he did so, and he had obliged her so far pretty often lately. “You look sad. Ah, you ought to have been born in sunny Italy, where young girls are mistresses of their own hearts. Their parents sell their hands, but they remain mistresses of their hearts. Here you English young ladies do the selling yourselves, and you have to sell both. But you were better suited for our Italian customs, *carina.*”

Then the glorious blue eyes gazed imploringly up at those cruel black ones that looked down on them, glowing as it were with passionate love; they looked up but for one instant, and then sank

dazzled to the ground, and her cheeks and throat grew scarlet, and the hand the Count still held in his, trembled ; and for once the Count felt himself the Judas that he was, and was ready to vow that no Ada nor Rosa, nor the whole lot of them together were worth giving pain to this young glowing beautiful Kathleen, who loved him and made no secret of her love for him. For one moment this was, and then he looked and met Sandy Beaumont's eye, and saw his expression of agonised jealousy. It was all gone, every thought of love for Kathleen, every feeling of remorse for the pain he intended to inflict.

It was not at first that he had seen the likeness in Sandy to his father, for both colouring and expression were different, and the Beaumont features, though almost exactly alike in father and son, were on no uncommon type ; but having once seen it, it became clearer to him every day. Both had the same cheery smile of unbounded

bonhommie, both the same careless easy movements ; the two images had grown to be so mixed in the Count's mind, that when he looked up it seemed to him he saw Charlie Beaumont, longing, as the Count believed him to have longed of old, to tear from him the beautiful girl who of right ought to have been his.

“ And she would have been ! But for the wife who still lives, I would have made this girl my wife in Rome. Now—she shall be Mr. Simpson’s,” and the Count looked fiendish at the thought ; but Kathleen’s eyes were on the ground seeing nothing of this, and she only felt the little lingering pressure he gave her hand before finally relinquishing it, as he spoke in those low thrilling tones that made Kathleen’s heart follow where they led, be it where it might.

“ I understand you. This buying and selling is against the grain with you. But you will get over it in time, for you

are not married yet, and yet — you flirt—*à merveille*.”

“Don’t Italian girls flirt too? Roman girls certainly——”

“*Pardon*; neither do they, neither do Roman men.”

Then she looked up at him again. Oh, if he would but offer in so many words! if he would but do it! But he did not; he did not speak at all, and she could not tear her eyes away, and yet she must not look at him for ever.

“What do you do over at Portsmouth so often then?” The words were as if dragged from her, it did not seem to her that it was she speaking them, but somebody else. She did not know that they were being spoken, till they were so, and then she could have stabbed them, or herself, or anybody, even the Count—so mad was she with the words for getting spoken. How could she ever have made such a mistake? and the Count bent over her with a

serious almost paternal air, as if she was a little child, and he was teaching her a lesson, or giving her some nasty medicine, nasty unfortunately, but all for her good, all for her good.

“ ‘ At Rome one must do as the Romans do ’ is one of your own proverbs, and in England I follow the customs of your country. I do not *flirt* with married women.” Each word sounded clear and distinct in Kathleen’s ears, despite the singing in them ; she looked up with a wan face like one who had in spirit been far away, and was but just returning to consciousness.

“ It is but with the unmarried you flirt then,” said she with a faint smile.

“ *Mais oui*, in England,” and he looked at her with those deep piercing eyes, “ and you, Mademoiselle, would make an excellent teacher ; you, who despised the easy prize of the boy-milord, will you take me for your pupil ? ”

Kathleen's colour had come back to her now, and her cheeks were burning, and her eyes shone with a fierce radiance. To look at her anyone would have said that she was indeed a Queen of Beauty, nor would they have readily believed that she was not mistress of the situation—and she was mistress of it now. It was but her love for the Count that had made her so weak before; that love would make her weak no more.

"I fear you would make no willing pupil," she said, turning round and fronting him in her proud young beauty. "You are more ready to teach than to learn, M. le Comte."

She was indeed a wonderful girl, a girl to be proud of the acquaintance of, and the Count felt he had never before done justice to her talents, perhaps he had forgotten to take into the account her spirit.

"They are not going to dance, Kath-

leen," said Sandy, coming up now half reluctantly, as it seemed, "and aunt has been making up a party for the theatre and wants you." Sandy's face was generally very expressive of firmness, but now his mouth was unusually firm set, and a close observer might have said that the teeth clenched underneath as he finished speaking; but Kathleen noticed nothing of all this.

"What is mother thinking of? oh, I can't go," and her face showed such horror at the idea, that Sandy said at once :

"Never mind. I'll say you are not quite well, and I will see you home."

"No, no, Sandy; for God's sake don't say I am ill. Oh, I will go, I will go. It don't signify. Nothing signifies."

"Kathleen, let me see you home," implored Sandy. "It is a long time since I have asked you anything. But don't go to the theatre to-night, please don't."

"Nonsense, Sandy, you are absurd," she said, more crossly than he thought he had ever heard her speak. "What can be the harm in going to the theatre to-night? Surely mother is the best judge whether it is proper or not."

"You will repent it," said Sandy, very low, almost as if to himself; but Kathleen fired up:

"Is that a threat, Sandy?"

"No, Kathleen, you know it is not," said he, sadly.

"Oh, Sandy, forgive me, you are the dearest boy in the world. No one else is the least like you. But I am *so* miserable, and I *must* go to the theatre to-night. Don't be angry, dear old boy; I am so wretched."

By this time they had joined the others, who were all impatience to be off, and Lady Killowen at once began scolding Kathleen for keeping them waiting, and then insisted on waiting herself for the Count to join

their party. She was never happy unless she had a lot of men about her, and the Count on receiving her invitation was charmed to go. So they set out, a large party of them, with Teddy Long and Cosmo Beauclerc loosely tacked on to them. Teddy had seized hold of the latter's arm, and been urgent to make him start, while the others were delaying, lest the play should be all over before they got to it. Now he succeeded in making him lead the way. Kathleen followed next leaning on Sandy's arm, and close behind them was her mother with the Count and Mr. Simpson. As they arranged with the box-keeper, and afterwards filed up the tiny theatre's narrow staircase, the Count whispered to the heavy yachtsman :

“ If you wish to have Miss O'Grady for your wife, offer to her to-night, and she will have you, I bet you five to one in ponies.”

Mr. Simpson did not know much

French; but he understood that he was advised to offer to Miss O'Grady.

"Yes—if I can get near her," he said, and tried to look very wise.

Then there was some difficulty about the seats, and the box-keeper looked in despair, he would have liked to have accommodated such a distinguished party well, but he could not turn out those who were already seated.

"I don't care the least about a front seat, mother. I shall sit here," and Kathleen seated herself on one of the chairs near the door in the big middle box which they had been shown into. For the Ryde theatre is so small, that people going to it do not generally take whole boxes, but as many seats as they may happen to want in any one box, unless they have a preference for the side ones nearer the stage, which, from the construction of the building, are very considerably smaller than the middle ones fronting it.

"Nonsense, Kathleen, as if I were so selfish. I shall certainly not take the front seat," said her mother.

"Pray do, I prefer this seat; I don't care about seeing, and it is much cooler here," then the Count gave Mr. Simpson a slight push into the seat next to Kathleen, managing at the same time to establish himself comfortably on guard over her.

"Here, Beauclerc, come along with me into the Gordons' box; there don't seem to be any room here," said Teddy, and Lady Killowen seeing no one was going to take either of the two vacant front seats, took possession of one of them, saying rather crossly, as she did so :

"No one cares for my company, it seems. I think you at least, Sandy, might help me."

Sandy went forward without a word; he helped her to take off her cloak, and he folded it up so as to make a comfortable

cushion for her to lean back against, and then when she suggested, not half propitiated yet, that he might as well sit down in the chair next to her, he was most considerate in begging her not to move, and assuring her he could quite easily get over between the backs of the two chairs, but all the while he was very grave.

“Why, Sandy, you look as if you had not a word to throw at a dog,” said Lady Killowen.

“No, aunt, I’m cleaned out to-night. But perhaps to-morrow I’ll have some small change,” said he, with a dismal attempt at one of his usual jokes.

Then Count Manfredi came and leant over the back of Lady Killowen’s chair, and she was quite propitiated, having two men in attendance upon her, and now having disturbed the audience quite enough, the new arrivals settled down to the play, which was drawing towards

its end, and in no ways particularly interesting.

Kathleen had seated herself rather in the dark designedly, but the precaution was unnecessary ; she could well have stood all the light that little theatre boasts of, in her then state of excitement. The lights seemed to dance before her eyes and there was a horrid singing in her ears ; but no one would have thought that more than the heat of the theatre was necessary to account for her flushed cheeks, and might not some of her flush, and some of the brilliancy of her eyes be attributed to the very ardent speeches of Mr. Simpson by her side ? For he was not a man to do things by halves, and when he paid a compliment he intended it to be known that it was a compliment, and there was to be no mistake about it. But broad though his compliments were, and clear though his intentions from the very beginning of the conversation, Kathleen did not

know what he was about. She sat there looking queenly, answering ‘yes’ and ‘no’ at intervals, and ever and anon, when she felt rather than saw that the Count was looking round at her with one of his searching glances, she would smile on Mr. Simpson with unutterable sweetness, and for the moment look deeply interested in him. But she did not know what he was about, till at last he took hold of one of her hands, pressing it with his large clumsy fingers. Then Kathleen looked up with a startled expression ; she was too much taken by surprise even to withdraw her hand, and at that moment there was a dead silence through the little house, you might have heard a pin drop.

The pretty actress who had before been personating the Ensign on the Loose, and was now playing the part of a young girl, who having given her heart away at last finds herself betrayed, had advanced to the front of the stage, and after a few

moments pantomime, gave utterance to one of the many stage adaptations of the old truth, "Men were deceivers ever." Hackneyed and common place though the sentiments were, coming as they did, Kathleen took them as an oracle, and she looked up in Mr. Simpson's face and smiled. Oh, how glad she was that she had done so the next moment; for the Count Manfredi looked round at her, as the actress's soliloquy ended, and actually dared to smile. She smiled back at him, and leaning forward said just loud enough for him to hear: "*C'est bien vrai, n'est-ce pas?*" Then she leant back glowing still more with triumph.

"He can never boast he has broken my heart after that," she said; then she devoted herself in good earnest to Mr. Simpson.

"I may have it, mayn't I?" he had asked when taking her hand. "You know I have forty thousand a year, and all quite

safe, and lots of houses, and the Flora ; you know the Flora, and it's all yours, whenever you will say the word, for I'd like nothing better than to see you sitting at the head of my table, Miss O'Grady."

There was no doubt about this offer, there was no air of trifling about him. It was but fair that she should give him her attention in good earnest now ; for he was quite in earnest, there could be no mistake about that, and before they left the little theatre again, it was all quite settled. Quite settled.—“ You will repent it.” Did Kathleen ever call to mind poor Sandy’s words ? We shall see.

CHAPTER III.

A STORMY INTERVIEW.

THE next day the Longs were kept at home nearly all the afternoon receiving visitors, and the room was pretty well full when Lady Killowen and Sandy entered it. Kathleen had excused herself from going on the score of a bad headache, and one or two people in the room, not seeing her with her mother, straightway began to wonder to each other whether the Count Manfredi was keeping her company; for though their engagement had not been announced, there was very little doubt about it as yet in the minds of the Ryde world, and even those

who had witnessed the *tête-à-tête* with Mr. Simpson at the theatre the night before, only looked upon it as a blind. "I am quite glad the Zieris are gone," said Lady Killowen, after a little weather and such like talk, which she as usual cut as short as she possibly could, "those high heels of hers were quite tiresome."

"Oh, dear little girl!" cried Teddy, "she has left a lace handkerchief behind as a souvenir for me. The stupid maid picked it up yesterday and never gave it to me. I could have told well enough whose it was; now it is too late, and I must keep it—with the others."

Lady Killowen did not admire Teddy, so she did not encourage him in this vein. "I suppose you had lots of things left about. I know the last ball I gave in town, when Kathleen came out, it was quite extraordinary the number of things people contrived to lose."

"Oh, bushels!" said Teddy, "but

pretty well everything has been claimed. By the way what have you done with that locket, Nita?"

"What locket?" said Miss Long, evidently not caring to enlighten her brother. But he, though he was obliged to knock under to her, as Sandy had said, when they were alone together, was ready enough to make amends for it by annoying her in society, when she was necessarily more or less in his power.

"Why that curious looking one with a coral rose-bud set round with blue forget-me-nots, you know which I mean. Give it me here, Lady Killowen wants to see it. Awfully pretty face inside, Lady Killowen. I am quite in love with it already."

"Oh, you're always in love," said she contemptuously, at the same time taking the locket which Miss Long gave up, rather unwillingly as it seemed.

She was a prudent young lady, and

though she had no idea as to the owner of the locket, nor knew anything about its history, still she knew that some little dangles of the kind had a history attached to them, and what locket could be more likely to have a history than this one with its fancifully sentimental device outside, and the pretty face so exquisitely painted inside? She was not well pleased as she saw it handed round for the general inspection of the company.

“Why that is mine,” said Sandy, suddenly catching sight of it, “how ever did it get here?”

“Your’s, Mr. Beaumont!” was the general exclamation, and “What do you mean by having such a thing?” cried Lady Killowen.

“Oh, did you never see it, aunt? I should have thought I must have shown it to you, it was one of my poor father’s things. I found it in a secret drawer in his desk, which was sent down to me at

his death, and I wish there had been something more in it besides," added he ruefully, "but everything else had been taken out, only that drawer was not noticed, I think. I did not find it out for a long time. A pretty face, is it not? But I never wear it. I don't recollect putting it on the other night," and Sandy looked rather puzzled. But he had no time to wonder about this, he was greeted with such a fire of chaff from Teddy and Lady Killowen, whilst even Miss Long looked very sarcastic about it, and asked if he was quite sure it was the right face, "there might so easily be two lockets of the same design, was he sure about the miniature?" and Sandy gave into the joke so far, that he took the locket into his hand, and going to the window made believe to examine the miniature very carefully.

"No, Teddy, you beggar," he said, "you are sold. There is no mistake about

it. I believe you half hoped you might have kept it with the handkerchief, and then you'd have sworn it was Miss Zieri's portrait, would not you? But there's no mistake about it; it is mine."

He turned round laughing, and met two passionate black eyes glaring at him with an expression that made all that saw it shudder. A violent hand was laid upon the locket.

"Is it not enough that the father should have taken from me the original? must the son also take the portrait?" and the Count Manfredi tried to wrest it from him.

But Sandy did not give up the locket at once, though he looked startled. For one thing he did not know that the Count was in the room, the latter having only just entered while he himself was at the window; for another, though the Count's words may not sound very terrible, his manner was not quite such as one meets every day.

“*C'est à moi,*” said the Count, and wrested it from Sandy's not very firm hold by an artful movement of the arm. Then he ground his teeth, as for the first time for fifteen years he met the proud happy glance of those sweet childish eyes ; the veins stood out on his forehead, and his whole face seemed transfigured by the passion that now possessed him. “*Maudit !*” he cried, “you have defiled it by your touch. As your father did, so do you. May you and your fortunes——” His voice never loud, though more awful in its lowness than the loudest scream could have been, died away in a long low growl, and tearing the locket asunder with his long powerful fingers, he dashed it on the ground, and ground it to bits with his heel.

“Count,” said Sandy, drawing himself up to his full height, and squaring his shoulders unconsciously, “you forget that you are in the presence of ladies. You

have used language to me—but we shall meet again.”

“ Yes, we shall meet again,” and the Count laughed a low laugh, “ we shall meet again ! *Pardon*, my charming Lady Killowen, *pardon*, Lady Long—there are memories—I can but make my apologies—I have disturbed your amiable society. Permit me for the present to take my leave, hoping some day to reinstate myself in your good graces. *Messieurs et Mesdames, je vous souhaite le bon jour—à vous aussi, M. Beaumont.*”

The scene, short as it had been, had been so terrible while it lasted, that those left behind seemed hardly to have courage to comment upon it, and they too quickly withdrew.

“ What did make you say it was your locket, Sandy ?” said Lady Killowen, as they walked home together.

“ I thought it was,” he replied. “ I have one exactly like it; but I am sure

now I did not put mine on for the Longs' ball. I never wear it; only at the moment I thought I might have done so in a fit of absence."

"I wonder whose likeness it is?" said Lady Killowen, with an attempt at a laugh.

She had never before been so near feeling frightened of any man, as during the Count's explosion that day, and she was anxious to reassert her courage.

"The Countess Manfredi's," said Sandy, shortly.

"Nonsense; he can't have been married. What has put that foolish idea into your head? I should have been sure to have heard of it."

"It may have been a secret marriage, or not a legal one. But he has twice insulted me, and I see no other way of explaining it. He thinks my father did him some great wrong. I am very like my father, am I not, aunt?"

"Yes, you are ; but you are different too. Sandy, promise me you won't fight with that man."

"I wish I could fight him, and have done with it all ; but he does not mean to fight me, I think. Only after to-day I don't know how he can refuse."

"But, Sandy, you won't ask him to. You are brave enough for anything, I know, and I dare say you are a very good soldier, as far as that goes. But you can't call me a nervous coddling old woman generally, and if you fight that man, I know he'll kill you ; I know he will."

"A good riddance of bad rubbish, aunt, if he did," said he lightly ; "but never fear, duels are gone out, even horse-whippings can hardly be called 'good form' any longer ; so don't be anxious about me. Tell Kathleen I hope her head will soon be better. Thanks, but I can't come in. I must almost run now to catch the boat, and the Colonel's been so good-natured

to me about leave lately, I should not like to put him out. Good-bye, aunt, and don't be anxious about me. I was always born to be hung, you know."

But though Sandy appeared so light-hearted before his aunt, the interview of that afternoon by no means rested lightly on him. It was not a meeting with the Count that he dreaded; in the unhappy state of mind in which he had been for the last few days, it would have been rather a pleasurable feeling to him than otherwise to have stood at ten paces from the Count—say under the o'er-shadowing trees of one of the Binstead lanes, or in any secluded bend of the sea wall, each with a pistol in his hand, waiting but the word "Fire," to be sent out of this world, which had lately become such a perplexity to him. For the Count was the sort of man with whom no one could entertain the idea of having a duel,

without feeling morally convinced that he himself must be the victim. Sandy would not have minded at all looking in at the Pier Hotel as he passed, and ordering coffee and pistols for two, and he would have exchanged shots with the Count over a pocket handkerchief with all the sang froid that is usual under such circumstances.

But it was no meeting with the Count he was thinking of, and that made him look so pale and depressed, as he hurried down the pier and just saved the steamer. It must be remembered that Sandy was in love, hopelessly in love with his cousin, and that it was her not thinking him worthy of her affection, but bestowing it instead upon the Count, or De Veux, or even Mr. Simpson, that made the world such a perplexity to him ; and so, if the truth must be told, Sandy felt more sorry for the Count than angry with him. The pain he had been suffering of late had

very much sharpened his faculties, and he had no difficulty in deciding that the Count himself had been the injured husband in that little story he had told over their cigars after Lady Long's ball, and that the man whom he had been led to call a villain, as well as a brute, was his own father. It was a painful reflection to him. Few young men would have so honoured a father's memory as he would have, if it had been possible for him; few young men would have taken such honest pride in their father's good name, if he had had such, and now thinking of this transaction in which he feared his father had played no honourable part, he felt himself dishonoured by the relationship. He felt as though the Count Manfredi were justified in heaping any number of insults upon the son of the man who had so grievously injured him. "Poor devil! if it were any comfort to him, I am sure I would gladly bear much

more," he said to himself, as he leant against one of the paddle-boxes smoking; and then he called to mind the bright childish face, and the little head so proudly set upon the white shoulders, so that one could almost fancy the scornful little toss which must have been habitual to it.

"She must have been a dear little creature. A man might love her very dearly," he went on soliloquising; and then he thought what it must have been to have had such a sweet little rosebud not only torn from one, but robbed also in the tearing of all the youthful pride and purity that must have formed so large a part of its charm—and Sandy grew still more compassionate, and called the Count "poor fellow" in his thoughts, and wished that it were in the nature of things that the son might atone for the wrong the father had done. But he knew it was not in the nature of things, and that such a wrong

once done must remain a wrong for ever, and no man could ever atone for it.

“ I almost think I would not grudge him Kathleen now. Oh, good God ! what do I mean by talking of grudging ? what have I to do with it one way or another ? How she loves him ! I used to think girls did not show their love ; but she is so grand, she is above all those little mean proprieties, and I believe no one else sees as I do how entirely she is given up to him. Aunt, I am sure, has no idea of it. Well I shall exchange, and go to New Zealand, or somewhere far away where there’s a chance of fighting. I could never stay in England to see her his wife. It is but fair though ; my father ruined his happiness, and now he consoles himself by ruining mine. I wonder whose I shall ruin in my turn,” and Sandy laughed bitterly to himself. “ I daresay he had a hard time of it when my father ran away with his wife. Ah ! he did not know

what good things were in store for him. Oh, my beautiful darling peerless Kathleen!"

And then Sandy hung over the side of the boat, looking down into the water, and so he remained till he landed at Portsmouth, and if his eyes were a trifle red then, do not blame him for it, reader. It was a hard time for him then, though bitterer trials were to come; and though more silent than he used to be at mess that evening, he was not less ready for his duties, nor less kindly to his men than of old.

But before he went to bed that night, he took out the other locket which he had *not* put on for Lady Long's ball, and hung over it for a long time, looking compassionately into the bright brown eyes and at the ripe red lips, with their petted curve; and wondered how many tears those eyes had shed after that portrait was taken, and whether those spoilt child lips had

learnt the sorrowful droop of the sinned against, or the set look of scorn of the sinning.

CHAPTER IV.

THERE'S MANY A TRUE WORD SPOKEN IN JEST.

So elated had Mr. Simpson been by the gracious manner in which the beauty of Ryde, *par excellence*, had accepted his offer (for as soon as Kathleen had taken the resolve to do so, she had done so, as she did all things, well), that it had been with hardly a pang he had reflected that it would be scarcely possible to let Miss Zieri know the fact before she started for Homburg. That being the case, there was no particular reason why he should wish to hurry the announcement, and there were reasons which, now that he had taken the fatal

step of offering and getting accepted, made him rather desirous to keep it secret just at first—in truth till he had arranged things a little. And Kathleen also was in no hurry that the engagement should be announced to the world.

“Indeed it is not one at all till mother has consented, and I must wait for a good time to tell mother. It will make all the difference in her way of taking it, what humour she is in when she is first told.”

Then Mr. Simpson felt indeed what a wonderful match he was making, if management was necessary to avoid the displeasure of the future mother-in-law. Now if it had been Miss Long, he might have felt sure of how the news would be received by her mother; and if it had been Miss Zieri, it would hardly have been necessary to tell her mother at all—that young lady quite undertook the management of her own affairs. Now in Miss O’Grady’s case,

it was necessary to *ménager* Lady Killowen. Dense though he was, Mr. Simpson readily appreciated the difference, and was easily persuaded to defer for a little the announcement of his happiness.

As for Kathleen, she felt as though she were gaining a respite by this delay ; she had no hope any longer of gaining the love of the one man she cared about, and that being the case, she chose to regard it as a matter of little moment which of the others, indifferent as they were to her, she should choose. Besides, £40,000 a year was a good price to sell herself for, so it was not shame of the bargain she was making, which led her to wish to conceal it for a time. But though she did not feel ashamed of it, yet she felt that in marrying Mr. Simpson she was selling herself for money, and though she wished for the money, she was in no haste to make the necessary sacrifice in order to gain it. Half the sacrifice would be made when

the engagement was announced ; but there was no reason why she should this day, or the next day, or the next after that find Lady Killowen in a suitable humour to receive the announcement, and she intended to be herself the sole judge of this. But the scene at Lady Long's was to interfere with her arrangements.

Lady Killowen liked the Count, but she really cared for Sandy, and not having heard that little story of the Count's, and having no other way of accounting for his evident dislike of her nephew, she attributed it to some absurd jealousy about Kathleen. It was not what she would have expected of the Count, for she had thought him clear-sighted enough to see, that, in whatever light Sandy viewed Kathleen, Kathleen only looked upon him as a cousin ; but still she saw no other way of accounting for this prejudice of his. As to the confusion about that other lady and her picture, she did not understand

it ; but was well content to consider it one of those little imbroglios which men are apt to be entangled in, and which their woman-kind had better not call upon them for an explanation of. But anyhow she felt afraid for Sandy : for she was firmly possessed with the idea that the man who fought a duel with the Count, however good a shot he himself might be, must infallibly be the victim ; and she was determined to interfere and protect her favourite nephew before he should be sacrificed, so she went at once to look for her daughter, and found her in the verandah making believe to read a French novel. But not many of those pages had Kathleen turned over during her afternoon in the verandah, and she would have found it very hard to give an account of the contents even of those few.

“ Kathleen,” said Lady Killowen, as she sat down opposite to her daughter, “ I don’t often interfere in your affairs, but do

you mean to have the Count Manfredi, or not?"

"I don't think he is very likely to give me the chance," and Kathleen dropped her book, and the exertion of picking it up seemed to be great, to judge by the colour of her face as she raised it again.

"That is all nonsense," said Lady Killowen, impatiently, "of course everyone is talking about it, and I am sure I don't know why I have let it go on so long. I daresay he has gambled all his fortune away, though people did say he was well off for a Roman; but it is so difficult to get at the truth, and those foreigners all play high. However, I am not going to talk about that now. It's Sandy I am thinking of. You have not, in your foolish flirting, been giving the Count to believe that you preferred Sandy, have you?"

"Not very likely, mother, I should say;

but it would not matter to the Count whom I preferred," and she laughed.

"Really, Kathleen, you are too tiresome. I often wished you were married, I am sure, you are always in some scrape or other. I never did half so much mischief in my day, and yet you are not near so good looking."

"No, I suppose not; I should have liked to have seen you, mother, when you were first presented," said Kathleen, languidly. "But if you wish me to marry, perhaps you will be glad to hear there is some chance of my doing so."

"Who—if it is not the Count nor Sandy—who is it?" asked Lady Killowen, now fairly taken aback.

"The Count and Sandy are not all the men in the world," said Kathleen, with a dignified nonchalance, such as her mother could never attain to. "Mr. Simpson offered to me last night, and whether he

gambles or not, there are not likely to be any money difficulties there."

"Mr. Simpson!" exclaimed Lady Killowen, with a smile of amusement, "and are you going to tell me that you mean to have him?"

"I suppose so—unless you forbid the banns, or do something of the kind. He told me his money was all quite safe," she laughed the same short laugh as before, "and that he had forty thousand a year, so I don't know why you should."

"Well, Kathleen, I never thought I should have married your father, but you beat me hollow," and Lady Killowen paused and looked with admiring wonder at her daughter, who could announce such an engagement so complacently. "Did the Count never offer to you?" she asked, after a moment or two.

"No," said Kathleen, "but my head aches so much, I must really go and lie down," and she went quickly into the

house before her mother could question her any further; and Lady Killowen sat outside in the verandah, and wondered how it should come to pass that she and Lord Killowen should have such a daughter.

“Why as for me,” she said to herself, “I was a pennyless orphan, and yet my uncle had to keep me under lock and key before I consented to marry her father, and she can’t get it from him. He certainly did not think much about money, or he would not have married me, and now she will marry Mr. Simpson because he has forty thousand a year—and so the Count has not offered! I never did much believe he would. I never thought he really cared for her,” and then Lady Killowen’s thoughts flew back to the picture of that other lady, whom she now supposed the Count did care for, and as Sandy certainly did not, she thought the quarrel could not be a very serious one,

though she was more than ever puzzled how it had originated. At all events it was not likely that either her interference or Kathleen's would do much good, and thus having bestowed an unusual amount of thought on the affairs of those around her, Lady Killowen went upstairs to dress for dinner, and before the evening was over, it was quite an understood thing between mother and daughter that Kathleen was engaged to Mr. Simpson, and that Lady Killowen was not to forbid the banns, or do anything of the kind.

"But it need not be announced just yet. We settled it was not to be announced at first," pleaded Kathleen.

"Of course it need not be announced for a day or two. But I don't see any object in keeping it secret. Though I have not quite your taste, Kathleen, Mr. Simpson does not strike me as the man to make any difficulty about settlements. However I must talk all that over with

him first, of course, and your uncles must be consulted. But I don't see why it should be kept secret after that. You are not ashamed of your choice already, are you?"

"I must tell Sandy first of anybody, mother. You can talk to Mr. Simpson as much as you like. But you won't write to the uncles before I have told Sandy? we owe him that, dear old boy—and I should like to do it myself," she added, hastily.

"Certainly you have the most extraordinary taste in the world," said her mother, half offended. "Most girls would rather be spared telling one lover how they had accepted another; but have it your own way, you always do in the end. There certainly never was another girl so spoilt. Ever since you were a baby it has always been the same, everyone has given way to you."

"I wonder how Miss O'Grady would

like hearing about the Count's state of excitement over that locket. It certainly was not her picture," said Miss Long to her mother, as soon as they were left alone together, able to give vent to those *épanchements de cœur* which not even Miss Longs can quite do without.

"Oh, he will never marry her," said Lady Long, "I don't believe a word of that story about the other night. Not but that she would be glad enough if he did kiss her," she added, in her venomous fashion. "But he could not do it without meaning anything, and depend upon it, he means nothing. I should not be surprised if he were married all the time. Anyhow, if he came to England for a wife, depend upon it, it would be a rich one. That is what foreigners always look for in an English girl. Oh, no, he won't have her, and as she can't have him, she will have that Mr. Simpson now. He is fool enough to be taken with her, I can see; you have

managed that badly, Nita. What was the use of ever being civil to a man like that, if it was to come to nothing?"

Miss Long's though a decidedly handsome face, was not generally a pleasing one, and just now as her mother spoke to her it was decidedly an unpleasing one; but she was saved from speaking by her brother's coming in, in his usual boisterous manner.

"Well, have you got over that shindy about the locket yet? I've been down on the pier trying to brace my nerves again, but it is useless. Catch me, Nita, I faint, I fall—the recollection of that awful scene—"

"Don't, Teddy, how can you be so absurd?" said she, crossly; but she was grateful to him for coming in just then, so actually spoke to him again of her own accord, a condescension that was not usual to her. "You do not know who the picture was of, do you?"

“Not I. The whole affair is wrapped in mystery. I only see there is a charmer in the case.”

“I don’t suppose she ever did look quite like that,” said Nita, meditatively, paying no further attention to her brother, and addressing her mother, for whose superior judgment she had a great respect. “But there was a strong likeness to Mrs. Courteney.”

“So there was, Nita. I never noticed it, but you are always so observant. Oh, we shall hear of her going off with the Count next, I daresay,” then the three went to dress for dinner in as great good humour as generally prevailed in the Long household.

CHAPTER V.

AN EVENING'S WORK AT SOUTHSEA.

IT was a great relief to Mrs. Courteney when she got that letter of the Count Manfredi's ; her life had been very boring to her since the grand reconciliation scene arranged by Major O'Connor. Her husband seemed to her stupider than ever ; he never got cross whatever she said to him ; he seemed to have no wishes, so that she could never have the satisfaction of crossing him, and then he never left her side ; altogether she was very tired of being good. When she slipped that letter of the Count's into her pocket, it was the first little bit of spice in her life since she had sat

sobbing with her head on Major O'Connor's shoulder ; she would have loved that gallant officer yet, if he would have let her, but as he would not, she could not shut her eyes to the baseness of his conduct. Twice had he shown how lightly he valued the love she had lavished on him, both before and after her marriage, and her power of love was well nigh worn out. She felt as if her heart had grown very dry and cold ; but then the less danger was there in playing at love with the Count Manfredi, and being rejected in one quarter, it was pleasant to meet with such loving protestations in any other ; only not from her husband, that was insufferable. There was no piquancy in love protestations from him ; he ought to be ashamed of himself going on with such nonsense for so many years. Besides, he never now told her that she was perfect, he never called her an injured angel, and it was only that kind of thing that

had a savour for Ada's used up appetite.

But the Count's letter, when she read it, was a very different thing to Charlie Courteney's tame and laboured flattery which had grown so nauseous to her now, seeing that he was her husband. She had liked it well enough, and thought it had the true ring in it of the speech of an honest man when he had been her lover; but a lover and a husband are such different things. It is not perhaps many men who make the mistake of confusing the two, but poor Charlie Courteney did, and his wife despised him accordingly. The Count Manfredi was not a man who was ever likely to make such a mistake, perhaps it was for a slight mistake the other way that his young wife had forsaken him. But Ada Courteney was not thinking of him as a husband, and as a lover's letter, his was very pleasant to her; she sat and gloated over it, poor weak foolish

woman, and pressed an old torn lace handkerchief to her eyes, that had once been a gay ball-going handkerchief but was now serving for a common every day one, as she wished it had been Major O'Connor who had written her such a letter, and then she read it over again and laughed scornfully, as she thought how impossible it would be for Captain Courteney ever to write any woman such a letter. Then she thought of the Count Manfredi, the real writer of the letter, and wondered how it had come to pass that he was sufficiently attracted by her to write to her in such terms. If he had been a beardless ensign, she would have taken it as a matter of course, had she fascinated him. But the Count had no qualities in common with a beardless ensign ; thinking of the two together he seemed like a being of another sphere, so completely had he been polished on the world's grindstone, so entirely *désillusionné* did he appear, and yet his

expressions were only more ardent than those a beardless ensign would be likely to have at his command.

Truly no novice at love letters would have written as the Count had to Mrs. Courteney. Poor Ada ! as she sat and meditated over his passionate words, they seemed to acquire a sort of power over her, which they had been very far from having when she first read them, and then remembering what she had heard of the flirtation between the Count and Miss O'Grady, her temper rose and her heart beat quick at thinking that perhaps he might only be playing with her. Kathleen's heart had threatened to stop beating, and she had felt no anger only an agony of doubt and fear when such a thought had presented itself to her ; but Ada was very differently constituted, and felt very differently towards the Count, neither was she too much agitated not to see at once that he was more likely to be amusing

himself with Miss O'Grady than with her. Doubtless it might be very amusing to carry on a desperate flirtation with the beauty of Ryde, and to be pointed out and envied as the happy man, especially when it was a farce and never meant to end in anything serious ; but in her case there had been great labour taken, much tasking of ingenuity, very little amusement, and there could be no envy. It all depended also upon her now, and whether she was "too good or too cold" or not, when the Count would have to take the so far serious step of having her to live with him, and when that came about, he would necessarily have to take a final farewell of Miss O'Grady. No more flirting with her then !

But though Ada did not love the Count and was not more than naturally jealous, the idea of the flirting in the meanwhile was not particularly pleasing to her, and she did not care that it should be prolonged. Why

should she not put a stop to it at once? if she was ever going to do so, why should she not do so now? this life was weariness itself, she could bear it no longer. So she wrote a few lines to the Count—it was one of Ada's characteristics that she never wrote long letters—this time she wrote a very short one, very cold, but very much to the point. She told him he had at last prevailed, she would fly with him whither he would, and as on the following Wednesday Captain Courteney would have to be on duty all day, she thought they could not have a better opportunity of getting away without fuss or annoyance. He might come to their house, if he chose, to join her there; but for her part, she thought it would be better if he met her at the Southsea station. She considered for some time if she would tell him of any way of communicating with her, but decided in the end it would be wisest to leave that to the Count himself to discover.

It was a very cool business-like little note, and Ada read it over with a grim sort of satisfaction before closing it up ; for as there was no guilty love in the note, she persuaded herself that she was but doing what she was driven to by circumstances. Nothing would have got her a divorce from Captain Courteney, and she did not see that she was called upon to give up all the pleasures of life, as she would have to do if she consented to live simply separated from him on the miserable pittance he would be able to allow her ; as to living with him, she regarded that as simply unendurable, so she considered herself innocent though unfortunate in the step she was taking. The world would call her guilty, that she knew, but then the world always had been so terribly ready to do so ; she did not feel bound to acquiesce in its opinion, and yet there was a something that held her back from going out to post that letter as she had at first

intended doing. Once sent, there would be no retracting it, and there was really no hurry about sending it, so she slipped it into her pocket, and lying down on the sofa tried to read.

But directly she tried to read her conscience began to prick her. She fancied Captain Courteney's anguish when he came home and found her gone. What he would do, she could not imagine; surely he would not shoot himself, or do anything else desperate? and yet she did not know. He was not a violent man generally, but in one thing he was violent and that was his love for her. She recollect ed how she had met him again when he came back from the West Indies, how the yellow jack had done its work on him, and she had not known him at first and how he had tried to recall himself to her recollection.

Major O'Connor's first desertion had just then left her very sore and sorrowful, and she knew that people were talking

and laughing about it, and she had thought them all very unkind, and been ready to hate everybody and everything; and she remembered how she had first discovered that Captain Courteney had heard none of all this talk about her, and what care she had then taken that he should not. It was so pleasant to her to talk to one man who knew nothing of it, and who was always courteous and respectful, never indulging in those familiar flatteries other men would so often use towards her. Then she thought of his offer, so pathetic and so pleading, and how she had surprised him by accepting it at once, because her life was intolerable to her, and she saw this way, and this way only then of escaping from it; she had persuaded herself at the time that she loved him also, but she did not try to persuade herself of this now.

She had never loved him, she thought

now, and she had been a bad wife to him ; now was she going to put the crown upon her badness as a wife by going away and leaving him ? Twice had she put her hand into her pocket ready to take out the letter and tear it, and twice had she refrained—she never need send it unless she chose, and it would be a pity to tear it, in case she should want it after all. Now she heard her husband's foot upon the stair, and she wished she had destroyed it. She had so wrought upon her own feelings, that she longed to rise and meet him as she used to do during the first few weeks of their married life, and she could not do so with that letter in her pocket.

Captain Courteney had been dining at mess, and when he came in his face was flushed and his voice husky, as was often the case with him now. Ada saw it all, without seeming to take any notice

of it ; but she could not avoid thinking that it had not been so when Charlie Courteney first came back from the West Indies ; he was a very different man now to what he was then. There she lay on the sofa pretending to read her book, answering him scornfully, and warning him off her, as it were ; watching him all the while.

After a time he got out the gin bottle, and went dawdling on drinking it by little quantities at a time, till at last he drank no more, but lay fallen back in his chair, sleeping a heavy sleep. Then Ada got up with a smile that it would have done no one good to see, and going out of the room went softly down to the house-door and unlocked it, and slipping out into the sweet summer night, posted her letter in the pillar, the close neighbourhood of which was always pointed out by the landlady as such a recommendation to the Courteney

lodgings. As soon as she had posted it, she wished that she had not done so; but the letter was inside the pillar now, and she could not get it out again, so she stole back into the house and softly locked the door again.

As she had left the room, she had cast one glance of withering contempt on her unconscious husband; now as she came back, she dared not even look at him. She could not bear indeed to stay longer in the same room with him, so she took her novel and went upstairs with it. She did not feel as if she could sleep; but when she got upstairs, she found she was still less able to read. She had done many things which you, my reader, with your very correct notions of morality would have disapproved of; but she had never yet done anything which she found it so impossible to gloss over to herself, as the writing of this letter to the Count, and now she remem-

bered, as for the first time she thought, when she should get the answer, that posting it as she had done on Saturday night, the Count could not receive it at Ryde till Monday morning ; she might as well not have been in such a hurry to post it. But it was done, it was done now—and as she had made her bed, so she must lie in it. Only she wished the Count could have got the letter sooner.

That next Sunday was a very disagreeable day to many people ; it was as a foretaste of purgatory to Mrs. Courteney, sitting at home in dreary expectation. She pleaded a headache as an excuse for not going to church ; but Captain Courteney was a terrible man, and said he could not bear to think of leaving her alone, and so would not go church either, so she did not gain much by that move. It was a dreadful day to Kathleen, who did

go to church, and would not go down the pier in the afternoon, as is the way of the Ryde world ; but sat by herself in her little sitting-room till Lady Killowen brought Sybil Mordaunt in to see her. She had avoided Sybil of late, and Sybil had thought, as perhaps was natural, that now Kathleen was older, and become aware of her own importance in the world, she was too grand for her, and meant to drop her ; and Sybil had felt mortified by this idea, and so had drawn back fully as much as Kathleen. But the latter though she had drawn back, had never at all meant to drop her friend ; only she had learnt to fear her searching eyes, and the serious view she would take of things which were passed over by others, and this afternoon she found her talk with Sybil more trying even than the service of the morning, and after that she had a

dropping talk with her mother during the evening, which was also rather hard to bear.

Sandy too found the day very dreadful; indeed to him it was more maddeningly painful than to any of the others. He had spent an altogether sleepless night, (and I think that was the very first sleepless night Sandy ever had spent) thinking how his father had embittered the Count's life, and how now the Count had embittered his; but towards morning a horror came over him, how it came he knew not, but it did come—in shadowy indistinctness at first, then growing rapidly into horrid certainty. He had received a letter once from the woman with whom his father had spent the last years of his life, and the letter, he was not sure, but he was nearly sure—nay, in the end he was quite sure that that letter had been signed Rosa. Was that the mean-

ing of that coral rosebud twined round by forget-me-nots outside the ill-fated locket? Sandy had seen her once, when he had gone down to his father's funeral, and she had given over to him a seal with the family crest and one or two such things which had belonged to his father, and which were henceforward to belong to him.

He had disliked the interview and he had not looked at her particularly, but he remembered that both eyes and hair were brown, and the hair had a soft wave in it, much like that in the portrait. She was not dead, that Sandy knew, at least. She must have died very lately, if she were so. Could it be, then, that the Count's wife was still alive? that it was *impossible* for him to marry Kathleen? The idea drove Sandy nearly wild; it had taken possession of him, and he could not shake it off now. At one moment he thought that the

Count was a monster of iniquity, and knowing all, which Sandy only now guessed, intended to pretend to make Kathleen his wife notwithstanding ; then he thought that the Count might know all, but that his former wife was yet alive—that very easily he might be ignorant of, and in that case he might be more sinned against than sinning, and then he thought that the whole was but the work of his unquiet imagination, and might be dissipated by an interview of a few minutes with the Count ; but, anyhow, that Sunday must be endured first. He had only come back to barracks on Saturday evening, and he could not ask for leave again on Sunday morning ; the day's duties must be got through somehow, but it was very difficult. He had to take the Roman Catholics to church that day, and he sat outside whilst they were performing their devotions, too busy with his own wretched

thoughts even to notice his favourite dog, a glorious Newfoundland which he had saved from drowning when a puppy, and made a bosom friend of ever since. But that Sunday he was too wretched to confide his sorrows even to Rover, though the dog did rub his glossy black head against him, and look at him with beseeching sorrowful eyes in a manner to win confidence if anything could have done so.

To the Count Manfredi that day was also very dreadful; English Sundays were an abomination to him, as to most foreigners, though at Ryde they are much mitigated by the pier, as in London by the Zoo. But this Sunday, besides the usual abominableness of most Sundays, was rendered additionally dark and miserable by the scene of yesterday, and the recollections it had recalled. For fifteen years he had carried about with him that locket, with the portrait of Rosa

inside, and had never dared to open it and look upon the young smiling face—now yesterday he had seen it. She had sat for that portrait during the golden days of a protracted honeymoon, when as yet no cloud had come between them, and she had not yet awoken to a feeling of loneliness from the absence of all friends of her own nation. Both he and she had been so charmed by it, that they had afterwards desired the artist to make a duplicate, thinking by means of it to give pleasure to her father and mother, and thus lay the beginning of a real reconciliation. It had been enclosed in a locket of the same design as the original one, and was only being kept back till a good opportunity for sending it could be found, when Rosa fled away with Charlie Beaumont. The Count understood readily enough that this second one was now in Sandy Beaumont's possession, and had thus given rise to his claiming the other, which

the Count himself had dropped at the Longs' ball, the slight gold chain that supported it having at last worn out; and all the light laughing talk came back to the unhappy man, that had passed between him and his young bride at the first putting on of the locket. How she had shaken her head with a childish assumption of gravity, vowing that the chain was not strong enough, altogether too slight and flimsy, and how he had vowed that it was only by such light fetters that he sought to bind her love; and how she had laughed and said, "that that might do all very well for her love, for there was a power stronger than any chains that held her towards him, but it was different with her miniature;" and fifteen years ago that power stronger than any chain had failed to hold her to him, and all those years the chain, which she had thought would not support her portrait, had done so, and now at last it had failed also.

“Was it an omen?” he wondered, “did it mean that Rosa was now at last dead?”

The Count, like all men of his class, was superstitious; he thought it must be, and though yesterday in his rage he had destroyed her likeness, this day he spent shut up in his room, with the shutters closed so as to exclude every ray of light, mourning for her supposed death. If it had not been Sunday, an English Sunday, when all shops are closed, and neither business nor pleasure can be carried on, he would have comforted himself somewhat by ordering a suit of mourning for her; but as he could not do this, he shut himself up in his room, refusing to eat or drink, and grieved over Rosa’s supposed death in the darkness, and this Sunday was a miserable one to him.

When Monday came, it was not much better for some of those who found the Sunday so unendurable, but the world

was going on again, and there was again something to distract their thoughts.

On the Monday Count Manfredi did not order a suit of mourning ; the swift rage of anger of Saturday had passed away, and so had the surely following depression which had worn itself out during the long Sunday ; and now he considered that if the snapping of the chain had had any connexion with the ceasing of Rosa's life, he would surely have had some presentiment at the time, and not have waited two days till he should think of it. No ; long as it was since he had seen Rosa, he felt sure she could not pass away from life without a kindred thrill passing through him, and he no longer believed that the breaking of the chain signified her death, but interpreted it to mean the severing of his heart from all old ties, that it might be the more free to devote itself to new ones, and then he read Ada Courteney's letter which had arrived by the morning's post.

“Wednesday!” he exclaimed with one of those smiles, which the French so well describe as “*un fin sourire*”—we English never wear them, and have no language in which to describe them—and then he murmured something about “*ces femmes*” and “*le diable*” in connexion with this note of hers—it would not be well to write down all the Count’s “*sotto voce’s*,” to write down his spoken words is abundantly enough. And then having made a few other reflections, he got up, and washed and dressed like a christian, and sat down to a twelve o’clock breakfast in the coffee-room.

A twelve o’clock breakfast may be almost indefinitely prolonged, and it was not till two o’clock that the Count stepped into the steamboat, to go over and do his work at Southsea. As he went to the pier, he met Kathleen with her mother and Mr. Simpson coming off for luncheon, and he treated them to another “*fin sourire*”

and would have passed them by, but Kathleen insisted on his stopping to speak. She had become all smiles and animation directly she saw him, and seemed inclined to be enthusiastic about "*ce beau temps*" for want of something better. It was Lady Killowen who asked what he was going to do on the pier at such an hour when everyone was coming off, and it was to her he told how he was going over to Southsea. "*Pour passer le temps un peu,*" he said, and Kathleen laughed one of her happy gurgling laughs.

"Don't forget you are in England, Count, mind, when you get to the other side. You must not act as you would at Rome, there."

The Count's face expressed that he understood, as they each went their separate ways; but Lady Killowen and Mr. Simpson did not, and begged hard for an explanation of Kathleen's last speech. This, however, she would not give, and on

her mother's pressing Mr. Simpson to come in to luncheon, she became rather oppressively silent, as people, who are usually talkative, are apt to do, when they suddenly cease talking for no apparent cause.

CHAPTER VI.

SANDY IMPLORING.

As the Count Manfredi went over in his steam-boat to Southsea, he met another steamer coming from thence, and in the other steamer he saw Sandy Beaumont, who, finding he had three hours to call his own, had immediately started off for Ryde to seek an interview with the Count. In the first irritation at seeing his attempt was a fruitless one, he thought he would go straight back again from Ryde ; but by the time he arrived at the pier, he had recovered sufficiently to think he might as well try to see Kathleen, and at all events

get her to promise not to accept the Count till she had seen him, Sandy, again.

When he got to Clarence Villa he was again provoked to find Mr. Simpson there, and, being already much perturbed, did not notice the warmth of welcome, so much greater than usual of late, with which he was greeted. For Lady Killowen had not forgotten the anxiety she had felt about him when last they parted, and Kathleen had never felt half so tender-hearted towards Sandy, as since she had promised to become Mr. Simpson's wife. But after the first few moments of unmixed pleasure at seeing him, she remembered she had promised that her engagement should be announced as soon as she had told him of it, and that she would do so at the first opportunity that presented itself, and she relapsed into her previous oppressive silence at the idea.

Sandy noticed this, and as (though generally very careful not to engross her atten-

tion to the exclusion of any man friend, even when he could most easily do so) he did not believe that she could care for listening to Mr. Simpson, and as he himself very much wished to speak to her, he soon gave her to understand as much. Kathleen wondered much what was coming ; and as, though she had insisted on telling him herself of her engagement, she did not at all fancy the doing so, and knew that it must be done now, she began to feel very nervous and led the way out of the room without quite her usual stateliness.

But having arrived at her boudoir, she seated herself with dignity in her usual arm-chair, and carefully spreading out her skirts, as much to hide her nervousness as anything else, motioned him to the sofa. In general Sandy would have been well enough pleased to sit on this sofa, but just now he was too anxious and unhappy for any comfortable lolling postures ;

besides, he wished to have a full uninterrupted view of Kathleen's face, so he drew forward an uncomfortable high-backed chair, and seated himself on this, close, yet opposite to her.

"Really, Sandy, I don't know why," said Kathleen, laughing; "but you remind me so uncommonly of a dentist, sitting there on that horrid chair. I feel as if I had nothing to do but lay my head back, and you'd have all my teeth out at once. Do go to the sofa, and then you may blow me up as much as you choose."

So Sandy had nothing for it but to go to the sofa, protesting:

"I assure you, Kathleen, I know of nothing to blow you up about, as you call it."

"Don't you?" said she, so quickly and sharply, that he stopped and looked at her in surprise.

"Why, what have you done? Oh, Kathleen, you don't mean to say you

have done it already. Oh, my God !” and he spoke as Kathleen had never heard Sandy speak before. As he called her by her name, he had risen from the sofa, and stood before her, leaning one hand upon the table, and looking down upon her face, as if determined to read all that was written there ; now he had sunk down on the sofa again, covering his face with his hands, and leaning them on the table, which shook and groaned with their pressure.

“ Sandy, my dear Sandy,” cried Kathleen, now really frightened, as she came forward, and put one arm around him, laying her other hand caressingly upon his arm, “ you frighten me. Indeed, dear old boy, you must not mind it like this. Sandy,” she said again in long drawn out pleading tones. For, though she had not been prepared for such a complete break-down, she at once concluded his misery was caused by the knowledge of her en-

gagement. “But how did you know of it?” she asked after a moment’s pause, during which he neither spoke nor moved.

He uncovered his face now, and looked up at his beautiful cousin, very pale, and with a sort of haze over his eyes as if he could hardly see her. “Know it, know what?” he asked, speaking thickly, and with difficulty. “I beg your pardon for frightening you, Kathleen; but there are reasons which make it very terrible to me to hear of this engagement. Forgive me, my dearest cousin,” and he led her back to her seat.

It was the first time Sandy had ever called Kathleen cousin, and it jarred painfully on the ears of both. The tears were running down her cheeks as she said: “I can’t think how you guessed it though, Sandy, how did you know?”

“Of course I have seen for a long time

that—that you liked that foreigner better than any one."

Kathleen's tears dried on the instant. "What has that to do with it?" she asked haughtily, looking up at him in amazement.

"I suppose it has a good deal to do with your accepting him. You are not the mean sort of girl who would sell herself for title or fortune," said Sandy wearily; he had much to think of, and could not see his way clearly. Perhaps it would be better now to say nothing to Kathleen till he had seen the Count, but he must ask her to keep her engagement secret for a while, of course it could not be a public one yet.

His last words had hit her rather hard, and he had a moment or two for reflection, before she said in low hesitating tones: "But, Sandy, I am not engaged to the Count."

"Not!" cried he, in astonishment.

“ Why, I thought you said you were engaged.”

“ Yes,” she faltered, “ and I am engaged,” and before she could explain further, Sandy thundered out :

“ What in heaven’s name do you mean, then, Kathleen ?” adding in a softer tone, “ I should not have thought it of you, that you would have trifled with me in this way.”

“ Indeed, I am not trifling with you, dear Sandy. I am engaged, but not—not—”

“ Not to that Count ?” asked he, leaning nearly across the little table between them in his eagerness to get her answer.

“ No,” said she, drawing herself up, and looking her queenliest, as she felt that now or never must the truth be told. “ I am engaged to Mr. Simpson.”

He positively laughed in her face as she spoke. “ Tell that to the marines !” he exclaimed, “ you won’t come over me

with any such cock-and-bull stories. But what do you mean?" and his voice had a slight tinge of anxiety in it, for he could not see her object in telling him such an improbable fabrication.

"I mean what I say," she said, with an air of being somewhat offended. "As you are one of my nearest relations, Sandy—and dearest," she added half under her breath "I insisted upon telling you myself, before any one else knew, except, of course, mother, and I did not think you would laugh at it. However, if that is all you can do, we may as well go to the others," and she rose from her seat.

Sandy also rose; he took hold of her hand, and looking in her face, said: "Do you mean to tell me, Kathleen, that you love that man?"

"No, sir, I do not. It is for Mr. Simpson to ask any such questions. They are no business of yours. Come, Sandy,

wish me joy ; you must you know sooner or later, so you may as well do it at once with a good grace—and let me go. The others will really be coming to look after us if you don't," she spoke coaxingly, trifling the while with a rose stuck into the front of her dress, and which it seemed very hard to adjust, thus avoiding meeting his eye ; and Sandy stood still before her gazing steadily into her face, and not leaving go the hand which she tried to extricate from his grasp.

"Kathleen," he said at last, "I know I am only your cousin, but will you look upon me for a few moments as your brother. You seem to think I had no right to ask that question just now; very well I will not offend again, but will leave all such questions for Mr. Simpson to ask," and Sandy drew himself up proudly, as he spoke. "But, Kathleen," and his voice took a sweet winning tone, which it was very hard to hear and not to be melted

by, “ I cannot let you tell me that you are going to marry such a man as Mr. Simpson, without warning you that he is a man whom even honourable men shun as a companion. Much more then should honourable women do so. But he has no single quality that should make you wish to marry him, you cannot really mean to do so ?”

“ Yes, I do, Sandy. I do mean to marry him, and nothing that you can say about him will have the least effect upon me. I know all that is said of him. In a place like Ryde one hears all sorts of things somehow. But after marriage he will be quite different—all men are. I don’t think it the least matters what they have been before—in some things at least—and he is very good tempered and good natured, and loves me very much, and I think we shall be very happy together. I mean to be, I know that ; so don’t look so deplorable over it, old boy, as if this was

my last speech and dying confession, for we shall have many another long talk together, I hope. And now Sandy, I shall be able to help you, if you are ever in any difficulty," said she caressingly, "you can't think how generous he seems to be about his money. It will be very nice to be so rich, and I shall soon be able to pay back to you that money you so kindly got for me. I really nearly asked him for it this morning, he talked so liberally, and I daresay it has been very inconvenient to you lending it to me for so long."

"It will not have been a loan, Kathleen, if you marry Mr. Simpson; it will have been a gift."

"Why—why? Sandy," she asked, her face flushed and anxious again; she had hoped she had succeeded in soothing him when he let her go on talking so long, but his grave stern words undeceived her.

"Because no farthing of that brute's

money shall ever go towards bribing me to consent to such a degradation of you," and pushing her from him almost as energetically as he had spoken, he walked to the door.

"Sandy, you are rude, you have hurt me," cried Kathleen, almost crying, and surprised at his leaving her now in this abrupt fashion.

But Sandy was not thinking of leaving her; walking to the door he locked it, putting the key in his pocket, all in the calmest most business-like manner possible, then he walked back to her, and said in a voice hoarse with emotion: "Kathleen, I cannot reason with you. Indeed, it is such a man that you have chosen, that I could hardly say one true word about his character, which it would be fitting for a lady to hear. But I do entreat you to promise me that you will break off this horrible engagement."

"Indeed I will make no such promise; I wonder you should think it worth while to ask such a thing of me; and I do not understand what you mean, Sandy, by locking the door and talking to me in this way. Mother made no objection, and she seemed quite to cotton to him this morning, though they had never taken to each other before. Well, I may as well sit down till you unlock the door, but I shall not talk to you any more till you do. I am quite tired of this sort of thing."

But as she sat down, Sandy flung himself on his knees before her.

"Oh! Kathleen, listen to me!" he said. "You know how I have loved you ever since I can remember—at least, you know that I have loved you—how much you never can know, and you know that I have never said anything of this kind before to you. You must have understood that, loving you as I did, I had

yet made up my mind to your being another's wife. God knows what it cost me to do so. There was a time when —when—but I have known for some time now that it could never be, and that you never could love me as—as I love you, that it was not even to be wished that you should do so. But if there is one blessing that I have asked of God more than another, it has been that the man who was to be your husband might be worthy of your love, and a man suited to make you happy. I tell you this, Kathleen, that if you have suspected me of being actuated by any selfish hope of keeping you for myself, you may at once put away any such suspicion. Some people might not believe me, but you will believe me, will you not, that I have no hope to gain you for myself?"

She signed with her head that she did believe him, and lightly stroked his

hand with one of hers. There was nothing that she could say to him, but she could not refrain from this little sign of sympathy. Sandy appreciated the kind intention.

“Thanks, my own dearest cousin,” he said, “but I do not want your pity; only one thing can be of comfort to me—let my prayer be granted. By all the old kindly feeling between us, by all the love you have won from me, and can never return, I do entreat you, Kathleen, break off this most unworthy connexion! Oh! grant me this, Kathleen, only this. You know it will not break your heart to do so.”

He looked at her, pale and imploring, kneeling all the while before her, and the suppliant attitude was not without its effect upon her. It was so unnatural a position for Sandy, who was not one of those men who would readily go on their knees, that it forced her to

think of him, not as the old Sandy, who had played schoolboy pranks on her, but as the despairing lover that he had described himself; and she felt that the picture he gave of himself was a true one, that every word he had said was true, and the last ones by no means the least so, and yet she hesitated.

“Sandy,” she said, “do not kneel to me; I am not worthy of it.”

“Promise me, then!” he pleaded. “What matters it whether I kneel or not? Only grant me this one thing. If it had been even such a man as the Count Manfredi—such as I did believe him to be,” he added, hastily, “I could have borne it. I should have thought that you might be a better judge of your own chances of happiness than I could be for you. But—” he stopped, for Kathleen had suddenly covered her face with her hands, and was sobbing violently.

She had broken down at last; up to this time she had borne the Count's want of faith without a tear; all her strength had been expended in making him believe she did not feel it, but now at last she broke down. "Oh, Sandy, Sandy, leave me. I am so very wretched! Why do you talk to me of happiness, when I can never be happy again?"

Then Sandy's face darkened, though not with anger against Kathleen; he rose from his knees now, and, stooping over her, softly stroked her golden hair, and fondled her, almost as a father might fondle a favourite child. He fetched water for her and coaxed her to drink it, and he poured *Eau-de-Cologne* upon her forehead, and treated her very tenderly; but when she seemed sufficiently recovered to speak again, he said, very quietly, though with the dark look in his face once more:

"Then the Count has told you all?"

"All what?" said Kathleen, still resting her head upon her hands, and not looking up. But Sandy had been very good to her, and she longed to be able to be good to him too, so she thought she would make him her *confidante*, as far as it was possible for him to be so.
"He has told me nothing. Because you care for me yourself, you fancy every one else does! but he never cared for me, only for that Mrs. Courteney over at Portsmouth. With me it was nothing but a regular flirtation ; that was all."

There was no pathos in these last words as Kathleen uttered them. She felt very hard, for she was thinking of that little scene at the club, of the Count's cruel words, and still more cruel looks. "That is what men are," thought she. "He is the only one of all I have ever known that I have really cared for, and even Sandy with all his dislike of him thinks I might be happy with him, and he could act in

that way. No, no, I will stick to Mr. Simpson, no fear of being disillusioned about him. I know all about him, when I marry him, and I know all about his money."

Sandy found it difficult to believe Kathleen's last words, but he tried to do so. It was so impossible to him not to be honest himself, that he could not bear to think other people so; but he was puzzled, and he spoke slowly as if he were puzzled: "Then it was all a flirtation with the Count—there is no reason why you should hurry into an engagement with Mr. Simpson."

"So, Sandy, you are the first to insult me—to throw in my teeth the Count Manfredi's contempt for me. Very well, be it so; it is a good thing to get hardened to it as quickly as possible, I suppose. But I tell you once for all, that whether there is a reason for it or not, I am engaged to Mr. Simpson, and I mean

to remain so, and if we both live long enough, I swear to you I will marry him, and no other." She had looked steadily at him as she spoke, but now her cheeks were flaming, and she rose from her chair and paced up and down the room with quick impatient steps. Sandy stood still crimson with shame and vexation; he knew what Kathleen fancied he had implied, though any such idea had been far from him, when he spoke, taking the words just as they happened to come, without seeing what effect the two parts of his speech had on each other. "Unlock the door, Sandy," she said in her imperious manner, and he did her bidding now, for he felt, as if he had no right to detain her longer. But as he did so, all the disgrace of her engagement that he had so striven to avert, came back to him.

"There was no such thought in my mind, as you chose to attribute to me," he said hurriedly, "but if you will keep

on this engagement with a man who is a drunkard, and whom you know to be leading a life of vice, you will force me to think far worse thoughts of you than that."

"Shall I?" laughed Kathleen, now grown reckless, "it will indeed be terrible to be no longer respected by you. But, at all events, as Mrs. Simpson I shall be able to pay my debts like an honest woman; and, depend upon it, Sandy, you shall be the first of my creditors to be satisfied. I believe you think you have a right to preach to me as much as you choose, since I have been in your debt, but I will soon put an end to that."

"No farthing of Mr. Simpson's money shall ever soil my fingers," he cried. "Will you not give him up, Kathleen, will you not?"

"No, Sir, I will not," and Kathleen brushed past him, and swept out of the

room, leaving him there; and Sandy dashed his hand against the table and cursed himself.

"I cannot live to see it," he said, "I cannot;" and then he too left the room, and left the house, and went hurriedly down the pier to his steamer. It was of no moment to him now to see the Count Manfredi, he did not even ask for him as he passed his hotel. All that he wished now was to get back to Portsmouth.

But when he got to the end of the pier, he found that there was no steamer for half an hour, so he hung over the railing watching the waves as they lapped so peacefully to and fro; and the reader may suppose, or not, as he pleases, that he wished he were resting beneath them. But if he did wish anything of the kind, no word of it ever passed his lips; only his face looked very set and stern, as he moved away from the railings, and catching sight of Sybil Mordaunt and her aunt

sitting down, walked straight up to them.

“Will you take a turn with me, Miss Mordaunt?” he said, and though she was not one of those Ryde young ladies, who are accustomed to receive and to accept such invitations, Sybil got up and walked with him, and he talked to her very confusedly—as she thought both then and afterwards—about how she was so good, and his cousin’s best friend, and he was glad to think it; for she might need a friend, and he believed Sybil to be a true one, and he hoped she would always be so.

Many girls would have expected an offer from his manner, so strange was it, but Sybil did not; she saw that Kathleen was mixed up in all that he said to her, and she felt a contempt for herself that she was pained by this. He seemed to take no notice of his steamer, though he had told her he was going by it; at last

she reminded him of it. He started, as though he had quite forgotten all about it, and in truth he had done so altogether. "Always thoughtful for others," he said, in his hurried manner, "be so for her, will you not, Miss Mordaunt? You never think of yourself, so I need not ask you not to let that interfere; good-bye, and may God bless you, you deserve it. Believe me, the only pleasant recollection I carry away with me from Ryde is of our friendship. You remember that Goodwood day? we shall never meet again, but I shall never forget you. Good-bye, Miss Mordaunt, promise me to keep friends with Kathleen, whatever happens," and he held the hand that he had taken in his, and looked into her face with wild entreating eyes.

"Yes, I promise, but you will be late—you will, indeed," and Sandy made a desperate rush, and only just sprang on board the steamer as it was already

moving away; and Sybil never even said good-bye to him, but went back to her aunt to be lectured on the glaring impropriety of her conduct, and to wonder what Sandy could have meant by saying they should never meet again, and why he had been so strange.

"Kathleen must have refused him," said Sybil drearily to herself, "oh, how could she do it?"

CHAPTER VII.

DE VEUX TRIES HIS LUCK.

WHEN Kathleen swept out of the room in lofty anger, she went straight downstairs to the drawing-room, where were her mother and Mr. Simpson, without giving herself a moment to regain her composure. If she did so, she feared that Sandy might follow her, and renew his entreaties, and she could not trust herself to withstand more of them. She had made up her mind to hold to Mr. Simpson, but whilst Sandy had been imploring her to break with him, she had found it more difficult than she had anticipated ; and she had seen that her only chance of

keeping to her purpose was to quarrel with him, so she had seized the first pretext for doing so that had presented itself, and now she was still trusting to her anger to carry her through, when she entered the drawing-room.

Lady Killowen, finding it rather hard work to entertain Mr. Simpson unaided, had soon given up the attempt, only replying to his desultory remarks with far-fetched though stinging sarcasms—an art which she excelled in, and which was very delightful to her when there was any third person to appreciate her talents, but which was very unsatisfactory in the present instance, when there was no one to hear her but the densely unconscious Mr. Simpson. She felt angry with her daughter for leaving her in such a position; it might be all very well for her to have such a stupid lover, but then she should not inflict him on her mother in this way. Lady Killowen took great

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credit to herself that she had never urged upon Kathleen the desirability of Mr. Simpson's fortune; she was quite sufficiently worldly to be very touchy about being thought so, and she plumed herself upon the manner in which she had received the news of her daughter's engagement. Not one sign of joy had she shown, she had even gone so far as to rally her upon her taste, and yet she had been fully alive to the delights of having a son-in-law with £40,000 a year.

Of course she could not forbid, or in any way interfere to prevent such a match. She had always allowed Kathleen a great deal of liberty about managing her own affairs, and now she certainly could not upbraid her with acting in a youthful and imprudent manner; the only sort of conduct which, Lady Killowen thought, could justify an interference.

In truth, too, it was rather a satisfaction to her that her daughter should have

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such a lover, as she in no wise grudged her. She was wont, though quite unconsciously to herself, to be somewhat jealous of Kathleen, whom she never would acknowledge to be half as handsome as she herself had been, and who yet won so much more love and admiration than had ever fallen to her own lot. She had had no such joyous holiday-making youth, as had come naturally to her daughter, and sometimes she would feel almost bitter about it. It was therefore rather a gratification to her, when she found that Kathleen was not going to make any so very brilliant match, and yet all the time Lady Killowen really loved her daughter. If she had believed that a match with Mr. Simpson would be for her unhappiness, she would have taken any steps rather than allow it to proceed ; but she thought that, if Kathleen, quite of herself, had made up her mind to marry him, there was no reason why they should not be happy together in

the end. She had a great opinion of her daughter's talents, and thought that if anyone could make anything of Mr. Simpson, certainly Kathleen would when he was her husband, and under her daily influence; but in the meantime it was very disagreeable to her that he should be left upon her hands, while Kathleen went away to talk to Sandy, so it was rather grumpily that she spoke, as her daughter came into the room.

"Well, I hope it's some very interesting news Sandy has been telling you?"

"He has not been telling me anything," said Kathleen shortly.

"Oh, indeed, I thought he asked you to go upstairs that he might tell you something. I don't know what else you went away for, I am sure. You ought to apologise to Mr. Simpson for leaving him so long. He did not come here to talk to me," and Lady Killowen worked vigorously at her lace work. It was wonderful

how finely and beautifully she did it, considering the way in which she tugged at it, when anything occurred to displease her.

Kathleen had never remembered till this moment that Sandy had taken her away to tell her something; she now wondered what it could have been, but she did not allow this to be seen, as she answered with that air of injured innocence, her mother always found peculiarly trying. “I am sure you have made yourself very agreeable, mother, and I could not get away any sooner.”

“What have you done with Sandy?” asked Lady Killowen drily.

“I left him upstairs, I suppose he will come down directly,” Kathleen replied indifferently.

Then Lady Killowen folded up her work, and went upstairs to look for him, leaving the two others to get on as best they could together; but as she did not

find Sandy, who had already made his way out of the house, she soon came back and proposed that they should go down the pier again, or do something, for she was tired of stopping in the house.

So they went down the pier, and Kathleen walked up and down alone with Mr. Simpson, while Sybil looked on and wondered, and thought of the comparison Hamlet made between his father and step-father, and had need several times to recall Sandy's parting words not to vow to herself that she could no longer be a friend to Kathleen, if she were going to take up with Mr. Simpson in preference to him ; and other people saw them, and wondered how it came about that the beauty of Ryde should have no one better to show herself about with ; and Colonel Gordon said : "The old story, a woman with too many lovers always chooses the worst," and Mr. De Veux hum'd and haw'd to himself : "She can't really be

going to have Simpson. I think a fellow might have a chance ; £40,000 a year is a big sum certainly, but he is another guess sort of fellow to what I am, I flatter myself. She couldn't blab, could she, if I did propose. I should not like Helen to know, if I had to take her in the end," and then he joined Kathleen and Mr. Simpson ; and everyone thought it was just like that foolish long fellow, thrusting himself in where he was not wanted ; and while all this went on Lady Killowen, sitting in a comfortable corner, amused herself very well. She was not going to marry again, so she need not consider the fortunes of the people she talked to, which gave her a much larger field than her daughter, and though Ryde was fast emptying now, and the pier no longer the pier it used to be, she was never at a loss to find people to talk to.

“ You will be very lonely without Miss O’Grady,” said Cosmo Beauclerc to her,

looking after Kathleen and Mr. Simpson, as they passed by ; De Veux had not yet joined them. In his flutterings about the pier, tasting the sweets of every flower, and then going on to the next, young Beauclerc had been attracted into Lady Killowen's circle. He started so many subjects in the course of the day, that it was no wonder he occasionally put his foot into it, as the saying is.

"Yes," said Lady Killowen abruptly ; she had been trying to accustom herself to the idea, but in vain, and it was very distasteful to her ; then she felt she had almost made an admission which she did not intend to make, and young Beauclerc recollectcd that though Kathleen and Mr. Simpson might be talked about as engaged to other people, he had no business to allude to anything of the kind to Lady Killowen as yet. So he fluttered away to some one else, and not many minutes had elapsed before the report was

set going that Lady Killowen had been congratulated on her daughter's engagement to Mr. Simpson, and had not denied it. But De Veux did not hear this before he joined the two, and was consequently so much wondered at for his stupidity.

Kathleen found both men very stupid, and she readily agreed to Mr. Simpson's proposal that the next day they should take a ride, instead of coming to that tiresome pier again. She had always been very fond of riding, a pleasure she could now no longer afford, so she at once felt the advantage of having a rich lover, when Mr. Simpson proposed bringing her up a horse next day. Oh, it would be very pleasant to have £40,000 a year! and Sandy must get over it some day.

In the evening they went to the theatre again, and so that day was got rid of without leaving much time for reflections dreary, or otherwise; but the night was

not so easy to get rid of, and Kathleen's pillow was wet with many tears before morning. At breakfast, too, she was obliged to own to her mother that there was now no reason for delaying the announcement of her engagement, since she had told Sandy. Lady Killowen did not ask how he had received the tidings, and for this her daughter was grateful to her, but she said : "Very well, I will write to your uncles about it. Of course I shan't tell anyone here, till I have heard what they say."

After breakfast she retired to write these letters, as Kathleen supposed, and she herself went into the verandah, and watched the sea, and the few yachts that still remained at Ryde; and thought about Sandy, and wondered if it would do any good to write to him, and what she could say. She wanted so much to have him for a friend now.

"Mr. De Veux," the servant announced,

throwing open the door of the room behind her, and Kathleen was not sorry to be disturbed in her meditations, so she greeted him the more cordially.

“How do you do, Mr. De Veux, will you come into the verandah? it is so nice and sunny out there. I always spend my mornings there, whilst mother is busy writing letters. She will be down directly now, I suppose the servant will tell her.”

“Thanks, but I did not ask for Lady Killowen; my visit is to you, Miss O’Grady, this morning.”

“Oh!” said Kathleen, and she understood at once what was before her, and longed to get it over. “What a pity it was she could not refuse him at once without having the bore of listening to his offer,” she thought.

“Forgive me for coming so early; but I wished to make sure of finding you at home.” Mr. De Veux did not quite know,

how to begin, but as Kathleen gave him no assistance, he went on, stammering somewhat. "I think you must have seen—must have observed—perhaps you have heard that I am engaged?"

"Yes," said Kathleen, thinking this the very oddest way of beginning an offer that she had ever yet heard of.

"And she is a dear little girl—a very dear little girl; but she is no more equal to you—than—" De Veux paused at a loss for a word, but Kathleen seemed so sufficiently impressed already, that it seemed unnecessary to supply the want. "You see I could not know I should ever meet any one like you, Miss O'Grady; but now I have, of course, I can't help seeing your superiority, and so, as I was saying before, you must have seen that for some time past I have been desperately in love with you. Desperately—" he repeated.

"Indeed, Mr. De Veux, I am sorry to

hear it, for your own sake, as well as for that of the young lady you are engaged to be married to," said Kathleen with dignity, seeing that he seemed to expect some answer.

"Oh, that is nothing," cried De Veux, who had now got into the swing of the thing, "of course if I love some one else more, it would be much better for her not to marry me, and she is sure to find some one else—but the thing is, Miss O'Grady, will you have me? I don't ask you if you care for me, because why should you, I know I aint worth much; but I'd love you so much, and I'd be a regular slave to you, if you'd only have me. Now, do say you'll think of it. You know I've got lots of tin, if I am not as clever as some people."

"Indeed, Mr. De Veux, it is not because I do not think you clever enough—"

"No, no; now don't," cried De Veux, deprecatingly, trying to get hold of her

hand in his earnestness, “don’t refuse me straight off at once in this way. Say you’ll think of it at least. I know I’ll only have about half what Simpson has got, but—”

“It is useless, Mr. De Veux, quite useless. You are exciting yourself to no purpose. I cannot possibly accept your offer—flattering though it is,” and there was a little of her mother’s tone of sarcasm in these last words, though not to De Veux’s ears.

“Not much comfort to me in that,” he muttered sulkily; “of course a fellow knows he is doing a flattering thing when he offers himself and all he has got to a girl to do what she likes with. But I might go and hang myself, for all you care it seems. It is your cousin’s been setting you against me, I know. He said I had no chance.”

“What, Sandy? He never said a word

to me about you. Did you tell him you meant to offer to me then?"

"Not exactly. A long time ago I asked him if he advised me to, and he said he didn't think I had any chance. Well, it seems as if I hadn't," he added, giving an appealing glance at Kathleen, to see if she had not altered her mind, but not finding there any signs of relenting: "Well, good morning, Miss O'Grady," he said, "I need not take up any more of your time," and he walked away, but all on a sudden turning back, he said, "I daresay I mayn't see you again perhaps; I shall be leaving Ryde to-morrow or next day. You won't say anything about this, will you?" and he extended his hand to her, as if in forgiveness of her refusal of him.

"No, of course not," said Kathleen, impatiently.

"You see I may as well marry that little girl now, and it would be a pity she should hear anything of this. She does

care for me, and it might break her heart perhaps," said De Veux, boastfully, now inclined to take a different view of that other affair to what he had adopted at the beginning of the conversation, and then the rejected suitor took his departure.

"Brute!" muttered Kathleen to herself, "they're all brutes," and she felt glad that if she must have a brute for a husband, she should at least have as rich a one as Mr. Simpson. But something whispered in her ear, that they were not all brutes; there was Sandy for instance. Poor Sandy!

"I thought you had some one here, Kathleen," said Lady Killowen, coming into the room. "I am sure I heard voices."

"Mr. De Veux was here. I suppose there's no harm telling you, mother, only you must keep it secret, for he particularly don't want it known," and

Kathleen's lip curled, "he offered to me, and I refused him, and so he is gone away."

"Dear, what a pity. I think I like him better than Mr. Simpson, and he is very rich too."

"Yes, I believe he is. I am sorry to have vexed you, mother; but you see I had accepted Mr. Simpson first," said Kathleen, in the humble good child way, she could always adopt so successfully when she chose.

"Very provoking!" said her mother. "Well, I can't go back to those letters now. There really is not any hurry about them, and I want to do some shopping. So come into Union Street with me. We'll go and see if any more of your photographs are ready, that is always an amusing place to go to, and I have got to drive with that horrid Lady Long in the afternoon. I can't imagine why she is always asking

me, whenever you have got anything very pleasant to do, too."

"Poor mother," said her daughter, "it is really very hard;" and as she went upstairs to put on her walking things, she thought it was very hard upon her too, that her mother did not seem more pleased with her engagement, when after all she would get all the pleasure of it, and Kathleen alone all the pain.

As the letters were not written, she thought she might as well try for a little further respite from Mr. Simpson that afternoon.

"I'm sure I don't mind, only you see it is so precious awkward. When people are engaged, of course they treat each other quite differently. You see I've a right to call you Kathleen," said that gentleman, "and you see people talk so. Depend upon it they are talking now of our riding alone together this afternoon. Curse them, they're always talking. No,

I'll tell you what, if you don't want it known just yet—why I don't myself just this moment, so I won't press you. But I won't stop here hanging about to have everyone talking about me”—Kathleen had never known her lover was so bashful before, and felt somewhat surprised at this new trait in his character—“I'll go out in the Flora to-morrow and just chance it, run down to Cherbourg, however the wind is, stop a day or two there and come back, and when I'm back here our engagement shall be announced. There, does that suit you?”

Then Kathleen expressed herself charmed with this arrangement; it looked like blowing up for a storm, and she thought even the Flora might have a rough time of it. But she shuddered, as it occurred to her, that if the Flora did have a rough time of it, come to grief in short, she could never be glad of it—and yet what an escape it would be! What an escape! At

all events now she would be her own mistress, till the Flora came back again, and she offered up fervent prayers that it might take a long time doing so. This arrangement seemed to suit Mr. Simpson also very well ; he, like Kathleen, had one person he required to announce his engagement to himself, and he had not yet made this announcement. Now in the course of the voyage to Cherbourg and back, he thought he should have a capital opportunity.

CHAPTER VIII.

A SUDDEN RESOLUTION PROMPTLY ACTED ON.

WHILE Sandy Beaumont leant over the railings of the Ryde Pier on that, to him, eventful Monday, he made one or two very bitter reflections ; and before he joined Sybil Mordaunt and surprised her by his confused yet earnest manner of speech, he had come to a decision concerning his future life, which, had he been told of by any one a short week before, he would have indignantly denied the possibility of. It was no wonder he was confused, this poor young Sandy ! For the time his idol was shattered, and

his future was not a blank, but a well-defined sea of misery looming darkly close at hand. Kathleen could not be what he had believed her, to think it possible to marry such a man as Mr. Simpson; that was the first source of his misery.

He had made up his mind to seeing her claimed as his own by some other man; but now Kathleen—his Kathleen—had suddenly vanished, changed into another Kathleen, a girl who thought Mr. Simpson worthy to call her wife. Sandy might go away before the fatal ceremony, might change into another regiment and see foreign service; he might die fighting for his country and his queen; but what sweetness was there in the thought that Mrs. Simpson would say, “Poor Sandy!” and exult as she told his praises, speaking low the while? If Kathleen married Mr. Simpson, let her never think of him again! He would

not care for any of her thoughts; and then Sandy's mind went back to the money, the final cause of quarrel between them, which she had said she would so hasten to repay him.

He had said she never should repay him, if she married Mr. Simpson, that he would not touch any of "that brute's" money; and yet he had told Major De Lancey, when he lent him the money, that he was sure to see it again. "And he is sure," said Sandy to himself, and yet there was no way but one in which it was possible that Major De Lancey should see his money again, if Sandy would not take it from Mr. Simpson's bride, no way but one. So he had taken his resolution before he went up to Sybil Mordaunt with that set look on his face, and before he joined his brother officers at mess that night he had sent in his papers to the colonel; but he said nothing about it to the others, as they ate and drank

together, and discussed the chances of the coming St. Leger.

Next day the colonel sent for him, and remonstrated with him.

"I don't understand it, Beaumont," he said; "you've no business to be in any difficulties. There's not another young fellow in the regiment I'd be so sorry to part with as you."

"You're very good, sir; but I hope you've many a better man left," said Sandy, and showed no signs of changing his mind.

"Then your papers must be sent in to the Duke, I suppose," said the Colonel, with a sigh. "There are always plenty of young men ready to join now. But you're the right sort, Beaumont. Well, well, you'll be wanting leave now. Take it as soon as you like; but I tell you what, young fellow, you may make a fortune at the diggings, or some such place, but you'd have done better to stick

to the old shop. It's all nonsense your talking about difficulties; any you'd be likely to get into would come straight soon enough, if you'd only have patience. Why, if you had only asked me, I'd have lent you money myself. By gad, I would!" and the good-natured, eccentric old Colonel, who had made a regular "pigeon" of young Beaumont, as they say in the sister service, thrust one hand into his trouser pocket, and looked ready to do the thing then and there.

"Thank you, sir," said Sandy, with a semblance of his old sunny smile lighting up his features for the moment. "But it would hardly sound well for the old 168th, would it, if it got about that you'd bribed an officer to stay in it in that way? No, sir, thank you all the same; but it is because I can never pay what I've borrowed already, that I must sell out. I don't mean to make a fortune anywhere, and I'd have stuck to the ser-

vice through everything if I could—only now I can't."

They went on talking for some time, for the Colonel was very loath to part with the subaltern whom he, like Major De Lancey, considered "the finest young fellow we've got," and Sandy, too, was very sorry to part from his kindly old Colonel, whom he did not expect ever to see again. Then, when the service leave had been granted, and the friendly leave had been taken, he strolled away into the billiard-room, and taking up the *Times*, glanced down the column of steamer advertisements.

"Sydney, that is much the same as Botany Bay, isn't it?"

"Just the same, I should say," said Jumper of the dog-cart. "Penal servitude for life, and all the rest of it. Epsom green for you and me, old fellow. You'll join us to the St. Leger, won't you? No! well I'm off. I sleep at Gosport to-night,

and the others pick me up there to-morrow. Sorry you can't come."

Sandy expressed no sorrow; he looked steadily at the *Times*, and saw how the Dunbar Castle would leave London for Sydney next week. "That's the place for me," he thought; then he went up stairs to make his final arrangements.

Major De Lancey was away on a fortnight's leave; he must write to him. He must write also to Lady Killowen, for he had taken no leave of her; but when he had written to her, he decided that it would not do to post his letter now, for he did not wish the step he was about to take to become known, till it was beyond recal; so he enclosed the letter to his aunt in that to Major De Lancey, and gave the two to that officer's servant to be given to him, when he returned from leave. He thought he ought not to go away without taking leave of his old messmates, and yet he could hardly bring himself to do

so. They were all full of the St. Leger and all their old pursuits, it seemed so unnatural to go and say good-bye to them ; he could not believe he was really going away, and that their ways were to be no longer his ways. He went down into the barrack-yard to look at his old dog, that he had begged his aunt to keep and love for his sake. “She is always so fond of animals,” he thought, “and she will be very sorry at my going away.” But that parting with Rover cost him a good deal, and he looked very sorrowful as he stroked his old friend’s curly head, and gave directions about his being taken over to Ryde.

After that he went and looked at Jumper’s horses, which were many of them as familiar to him as if they had been his own, and spoke a few kindly words to those of his men whom he knew best, then he went in and said good-bye to his brother officers. They

knew he was going by this time, and had all been very sorry to hear it; but they were very full of the St. Leger, and each man had got some little hobby of his own, that served to distract his thoughts from Sandy. “The colonel ought to have refused his papers,” one of them had said, and then they had all agreed that the colonel ought to have refused his papers. But after that they had fallen to discussing what difference it would make in the regiment, and how So-and-so might as well have paid for getting his step.

“Beaumont has been a fool to be so devilish quick about sending in his papers. He’d have got pretty near £200, if he’d only managed properly.”

Sandy knew this too; but he did not wish to make a fortune by the sale of his commission, he would get enough to pay Major De Lancey, and have something to start to Australia with. What did he want with £200 more? it could

give him no pleasure, and he knew the old 168th well enough to be aware, that those who would profit by his going, would have plenty of need of the money themselves. "Let them keep it, poor beggars," said the young man, who in the bitterness of his grief at leaving the service could not bear even to seem to make a profit of it.

When he went into the mess-room, there were not any of his particular friends there, so the farewells were quickly over, only one or two of them said they would walk down to the station with him. Beaumont was a very popular officer, and it would be something for them to boast of at mess that night, that they had seen him off.

"Rover will go with you to the station, sir, won't he," asked the sergeant, into whose charge Sandy had given him, as they passed out of the barrack-yard. "I'll see him back, sir. No, no trouble,

at all, sir ; he knows me, and he'll follow me well enough."

So Rover went to the station, and the sergeant followed behind ; but when it was time for him to carry out his promise and take the dog back again, he found it no such easy matter. Rover seemed to have a foreboding that the parting was to be a long one, and leapt upon Sandy, and howled piteously, and at last struggled violently when the sergeant in desperation seized him by the collar, and tried to lead him off by main force.

" It is a shame, Beaumont, it is indeed," said honest Jack Gaskell, who had only just joined, and had none of his boyish sensibilities smoothed out of him yet, winking violently to keep the tears back as he spoke. " You shouldn't hurt the poor beast's feelings so. It would not do you any harm to take him with you."

" But I want my aunt to have him,"

said Sandy. "She'd like to have him, I'm sure."

"She'd like much better for him to be with you," said young Gaskell.

"Jump in, sir; the train is just off. Here, sir, here's an empty carriage. You could take the dog with you, sir, if you liked," and the guard opened a carriage door, as he spoke, and Sandy sprang in; and Rover either used unexpected violence, or the sergeant's heart smote him, for the next moment the dog bounded in too, springing upon Sandy, and licking him all over in his transports at being with him again.

"Down, Rover, down, dear old dog," and Sandy buried his face in the curly locks, and when he raised it again there were tears glittering on the black hairs. "Well, I believe Gaskell is right," he said, "and aunt had rather I had him with me. I can write again from London, and explain how it has happened." He travelled

up to London alone the whole way ; the guard every now and then looking in upon him, and talking to Rover a little, but never suffering any other passenger to get in and disturb the two, the man and his dog.

There was plenty for Sandy to do in town, but he thought the time would pass very heavily till the Dunbar Castle sailed ; then there would be the long voyage, which always makes such a delicious rest in the stern battle of life to those that love the sea, and Sandy did love the sea and longed to be upon it now. But after that there was the beginning of all the dreary fight over again at Sydney, and that he dreaded very much, and before that there was all the wearisome time till he got the money for his commission, and the Dunbar Castle sailed. He took for granted that one would precede the other, but the time would be very difficult to pass whatever he found to do in it ; and first he

thought he must go and look up his uncle, the Hon. Tom O'Grady ; for though he was anxious to leave Lady Killowen and Kathleen in ignorance of his movements as long as possible, it would not do to treat all his relations in that way, or it might make them think his money affairs had been even disgracefully involved, and that he had been too much ashamed to speak of them.

Tom O'Grady was a safe find in town pretty near all the year round, and he was at his Club now, when Sandy went to look for him. He was very much surprised at his nephew's news, and did not much like the change that had come over the face once so remarkable for its cheerful *bon-hommie* though he made no remark upon this. But after a few moments devoted to astonishment, he took to congratulating Sandy on the energy he was showing.

" Depend upon it, me boy, it's a devil-

ish dull life a man of family leads in England if he hasn't fortune to back him," said poor Tom O'Grady, who had truly tasted most of the sweets of younger brotherdom. He made no remark on Sandy's altered appearance, for poor Tom, though he had never been troubled with many brains, had a kindly tact of his own, and he knew how near Ryde and Portsmouth were, and suspected Sandy had been seeing a good deal of his beautiful cousin lately. Tom O'Grady recollect ed Lady Killowen as a young girl, and though he never would admit that her daughter at all came up to her, he easily understood that such intercourse might be dangerous.

He too had been a silly moth once, and had scorched his wings in the flames, and the dreadful day was still fresh in his memory, when he had first heard how his elder brother had won the hand of the beautiful pennyless orphan. People did

say at the time that she preferred poor Tom; but though never a very devoted wife, there had been nothing in the course of her after life to justify such a belief, and of course no such match could ever have been thought of for a moment for either of them. Tom O'Grady could hardly be said to have remained true to Lady Killowen all his life, but he had certainly never married, and he remembered her still very well; and so he was very ready to fancy that Kathleen O'Grady might have had somewhat the same effect on Sandy Beaumont as her mother had had on himself; and he wondered how it would have been if he had taken heart, when the fatal blow was given to his hopes, and gone to distant lands to push his fortune as he believed his nephew now meant to do. He rather envied Sandy, who still had it in his power to do so, and this envy Sandy found almost harder to bear than anything.

He was not going to Sydney, or Botany Bay, as he preferred calling it in his thoughts, to push his fortunes, but for penal servitude for life, as Jumper had said; and now that he was giving up everything that made life dear to him, it was gall and wormwood to him to hear his uncle saying how he might still come home with a fortune before he was an old man, and had lost the power to enjoy it. Power to enjoy it, good Heavens! and home! what right had he now to call England home, when he was just throwing away the sword he had meant to wield in her defence? Sandy was very young and very unhappy, and though unhappiness may pass away quicker in youth, it brings about quicker also that state of despairing exaltation, when everything is naught, and naught everything, and which had already made Sandy throw away the certainty of two hundred pounds at least. Do not despise him for it too much, prac-

tical reader; but you must acknowledge that after that it was nonsense to talk of his going out to Australia to make his fortune, forsooth!

CHAPTER IX.

COUNT MANFREDI AND THE MAID-OF-ALL-WORK.

WHEN Count Manfredi went over to Southsea on that Monday on which he met Sandy Beaumont coming over to Ryde, met but did not speak to him, he was a good deal puzzled as to how he was to communicate with the beautiful Ada. She had told him of no means of doing so, being, as will be remembered, herself puzzled what to recommend. Captain Courteney was such a very attentive husband there was no stirring out without him, and though that giving of the letter in his presence had been very satisfactorily managed once, it could

hardly be brought about again advantageously. The post was a most undesirable medium, for he was almost always at home at post time, and would generally receive the letters himself, studying the outside of her correspondence well before he handed it over to her. The Count knew of this little peculiarity of Captain Courteney's, a peculiarity which Ada often ridiculed, so he was not likely to try the post. Ada had lived through that purgatorial Sunday, and now that Monday had come she was almost getting hardened to it, but she did very much wish to hear from the Count Manfredi, and she wondered how he would manage that she should; and the Count wondered also, having no very definite plan in his mind as he walked out to the Courteny lodgings to reconnoitre the situation, with the letter in his pocket, in case any opportunity should present itself. Not arriving at any satisfactory results from his re-

connoitring, he thought it best to take the matter with a high hand, and walking up to the door knocked boldly at it. Lodging house servants were very changeable, he knew; it might be that a new one would open the door, who would not recognise him, and then if Mrs. Courteney were but at home, all would be easy. Fortune favoured the brave, as she so often does. It was a new servant that opened the door, a more strapping-looking girl with a dirtier face, than even the last had been.

But now a new difficulty presented itself; for Captain and Mrs. Courteney were both at home, as she informed the Count in answer to his inquiries, not offering to show him up though, but holding the door just ajar, with a *farouche* fresh-caught air, as if she were only waiting a good opportunity to shut it in his face, as is the way with a certain class of maids-of-all-work. Then the Count

was at a loss; he could understand English well enough, but he could not speak it. However he was not going to be baffled, so he took out his letter, and pointed at the direction.

The dirty maid bent over the letter, almost leaving go of her hold on the door as she did so, for her knowledge of written characters was hardly so great as the Count's knowledge of English. "Mrs. Courteney, yes," said she slowly.

"No—Captain Courteney," said the Count, and slipped a shilling into her hand.

"No—Captain Courteney," repeated the dirty maid, as if she did not at all understand it, and stared with suspicious eyes at the shilling.

The Count thought he would try the effect of another shilling, repeating the same formula, this time with a variation. "Captain Courteney—no," he said.

"Captain Courteney—no," said the

dirty maid, seeming more puzzled than ever, but pocketing the two shillings as if she quite understood them.

The Count was in despair ; he could not stand there for ever parleying with this horrid girl, who would not understand him. She had taken hold of the door again, as if she really were going to shut it in his face this time. “ Bah ! ” said he, “ *les délices de l'amour,* ” and raising her chin with one hand, he kissed the hard rosy cheek, then pointing again to the direction of the letter, “ Captain Courteney—no,” he said, this time more determinedly than before.

A gleam of understanding lighted up the features of the dirty maid. In her own class, doubtless, she was considered handsome, “ a fine figure of a girl, leastways ! ”

“ Oh, laws, sir ! I understand now. Give it to Mrs. Courteney when the

Captain isn't by. Yes, I understand, sir. Thank'ye, sir, thank'ye!"

This, as another shilling was slipped into her hand along with the letter for Mrs. Courteney. Then the Count walked away, successful, indeed, but feeling as if he had made a greater sacrifice for Ada's sake than any he had ever expected to be demanded of him—and the recollection of that wretched maid-of-all-work whom he had had to kiss, with her bouncing crinoline and dirty skirts, her hair all rough and awry, and a mangy net half dropping off, often came back to the Count as a horrid nightmare, and gave rise to more feelings of remorse in after years than perhaps any other action in his life. The hardest part of all was, that he could never lay claim to any gratitude from Ada for this sacrifice that he had made for her sake, for the girl was handsome, yes, a very fine figure of a girl.

In his letter the Count had told Mrs.

Courteney that he would gladly have joined her at her house on the Wednesday morning; but seeing that she preferred the station, for motives which he could both appreciate and respect, he would be in waiting for her there at eleven o'clock, to depart by the next train for London, the 11.25.

They would thus be able, he hoped, without any disagreeable hurry to get across to France the same night. The Count was desirous to get out of England as soon as possible; he did not foresee any pleasure likely to arise from an interview with the poor innocent of a Captain, Ada's husband, so he wished to put the sea between them at the earliest opportunity. The intricacies of an English Bradshaw were beyond the Italian, and not wishing to spread the knowledge of his intended route at Ryde, he was debarred from the assistance of the waiters at the hotel; but he recol-

lected the many advertisements he had seen, “From London to Paris in ten hours,” so he thought it was the simplest way to go up to town, and that then he must be able to get across in the day, if he inconvenienced himself to the extent of starting from Ryde sufficiently early to leave Portsmouth by the 11.25.

On the day that elapsed before he left Ryde, the Count took leave of his various friends there, and among them he left a card at Lady Killowen’s door. Had either of the ladies been at home, he would not have shrunk from a personal interview; but as the reader knows, Lady Long was driving out her dear friend Lady Killowen, and Mr. Simpson acting the gallant cavalier to his beautiful *fiancée*; so the Count only left a card *pour prendre congé*, and as he did so a slight pang smote his heart. He had wished to make Sandy’s life a burden to him; he had had a reason for

wishing it, and he had done so; but it hardly seemed to him now that he had had sufficient motive for wrecking the happiness of that grand young beauty, Kathleen O'Grady. He felt a twinge of remorse now, and so he spent his last evening writing her a letter, as a sort of consolation stakes.

“*Adieu, charmante Miss O'Grady,*” he began; he had always called her by her name of late, unless he had addressed her as *anima mia*, or by some such endearing title; but he thought it best to stick to the surname in this, which he intended for his last farewell. He told her he was bidding her adieu, as he feared for ever, for reasons which she would hereafter understand—it was thus he referred to his connexion with Mrs. Courteney; that he had thought to leave her in silence like a stoic, but that at the last moment the pain of parting wrang from him these few parting words of farewell. He re-

called the happy days they had spent together in Rome, when the kindred sympathy between their souls had promised so fairly to ripen their friendship into something sweeter still, but for the miserable shadow from his past—it was thus he referred to his wife—ever hanging over him, and blackening for him all that innocent sunshine, bright beings like herself might bask in, and which none could value more highly, or long for more passionately than he did, but from which he, miserable man that he was, was for ever cut off. Might her future escape all such baleful influences, and in the midst of happiness and those riches for which she was evidently about to sell herself—the price most unworthy of the object—he prayed her sometimes to spare a thought for her unfortunate Antonio di Manfredi, “*qui ne vous oubliera jamais.*”

This little note was couched in the most

exquisite Parisian, and written upon the most delicately perfumed note paper, and it was not without a covert allusion to those withered flowers, gathered on a sun-shiny afternoon at Rome, which he had shown Kathleen as she was about to drive away from the concert where he first saw her again, and which he had afterwards tumbled out on the deck of the steam-boat for Sandy to pick up, that the Count sealed his note with a forget-me-not. Truly those pale blue flowers must have had many associations for him.

He had been well pleased with his composition, and smoked his cigar with the greater relish after it, astonishing Teddy Long and Cosmo Beauclerc—who had been dining together, at the latter's expense, of course—by his vivacity, so light, and so *spirituel*. Teddy indeed was so fascinated by it that he volunteered to be his companion up to town next day.

"I haven't had a lark for a long time," he said, "and though town's as empty as can be just now, yet there are always some fair charmers to be found there." The Count got out of it in the end, though it was no very easy matter, for Teddy was not quick to fancy himself *de trop* anywhere; but luckily De Veux sauntered into the coffee-room, and it appeared that he also was going up to town next day, and did not intend to arrive till just about dinner time, which suited Teddy better. "We'll dine together then," said he, "and if you'll stand the dinner, I'll tell you what, old boy, I'll go down to—Huntingdonshire, isn't it, and stand by you like a brick when you're turned off. The happy ceremony is to come off soon, isn't it?"

"Oh, it will come off soon enough, but it isn't Huntingdonshire," said De Veux, sulkily; and said nothing about the dinner,

which annoyed Teddy more, so having had enough rebuffs for one night, he took himself off for the present.

But he did get the dinner, all the same, out of De Veux the next night, and he made further offers of his services on the occasion of the happy event soon coming off. He did not say Huntingdonshire this time; though if not, where it was Teddy could not imagine for the life of him.

"Leicestershire," said De Veux, curtly.

"Oh, that's it of course, the hunting county. That's what put Huntingdonshire into my head, I suppose."

At this De Veux waxed very sulky indeed, for he was not a hunting man, and had consequently been thought no great shakes in Leicestershire; till Helen's mother found out all about the rich uncle, and encouraged silly little Helen to lose her girl's heart to him. No very difficult matter, for though the young

man had had the misfortune to be brought up by his uncle far away from the hunting country, that was not likely to be an unpardonable fault in a girl's eyes, when the young man was good-looking, and was besides her first lover. But De Veux never felt very happy in Leicestershire among all the hunting men, and worse still hunting ladies—even Helen hunted, but that he had determined she never should do again after her marriage—so Teddy's remark brought on such a fit of the blues, that that volatile lounger on Ryde Pier soon regretted his generous offer of being best man. But De Veux and Teddy between them have led us far away from the Count Manfredi, who was so lively and agreeable after he had done his last little bit of sentiment with Kathleen O'Grady.

It is very difficult to say how a man like the Count feels, when about to run off with such a woman as Mrs. Courteney.

It would be easy to paint him such a hardened villain as to have no feeling left; but this portrait would have the great fault of being deficient in truth. The Count Manfredi was a villain, there can be no doubt about his being so now, whatever he may once have promised to be; but he was a villain more through over-fostering of his feelings, than through hardening of them, and though this might not be altogether a new situation to this Don Juan, yet he meant to get out of it all the sentiment that such a situation could afford him. But whatever his feelings were, they were not betrayed by his manner, as he sipped his coffee on Wednesday morning, or even nearer to the realisation of his hopes, as he slowly sauntered about the Portsmouth station. Only one subject for regret had he yet to trouble him, that he had not seen and taunted Sandy in his misery before he left Portsmouth, but for that there was

not time, so he had to satisfy himself with the consciousness of having brought it about.

CHAPTER X.

MRS. COURTENEY AND THE COUNT.

THERE was not much show of feeling in Mrs. Courteney either before she left her husband's house. The day before, Captain Courteney had asked her if she would not like to invite Mrs. Tatty, one of the other captains' wives to spend the day with her, as she would be alone for so long. It had been the custom between these two ladies, that whenever Mrs. Tatty was to spend the day without her husband, she would invite Mrs. Courteney to share her solitude, and Mrs. Courteney would do the same by Mrs. Tatty ; but of late there had been a considerable diminution in

their friendship, and Captain Courteney did not feel at all sure that Mrs. Tatty would come, if his wife asked her, so he did not press it much upon Ada, when she said she would as soon be alone. He felt no anxiety about leaving her for this one day, no vague forebodings came over the poor Captain's mind, as he left his shabby little lodgings that morning. It was a dreary drizzling day, and he had expressed many fears lest Ada, should be very dull without him, before he made up his mind to leave her; but no fears of any other kind overpowered him, and drove him back as he crossed the threshold and closed behind him the door, which the dirty maid had clung to as she parleyed with the Count Manfredi two days before.

When she was left alone, Mrs. Courteney went quickly to her packing; it was soon done, her wardrobe was in a distressingly deficient state, and there was

not much else she cared to take with her. She had very few treasures. The gold and turquoise pen was not forgotten, and Ada heaved a sigh as she placed that within her desk—the Hon. Alick De Vere had been the first man with whom she had played that dangerous game of pretending to like ; there had been many since. A trumpery little locket silver gilt, with a photograph of Major O'Connor inside, was also packed up, but there were not many things of the sort. One or two locks of hair she thought it safest not to take ; she had been surprised as well as angry when she first found Captain Courteney prying into the secrets of her desk. “He is so mean,” she then said ; did she think the man she so far preferred to him, that she was going to throw up all the character she yet had left for his sake, mean also ? or why was it that she felt at once, that not even in her most secret drawer would those locks of hair be safe

from the Count Manfredi's searching eyes ? One of those locks of hair was Charlie Courteney's given in exchange for one of hers, when he was a young subaltern before he went out to the West Indies. She had been very young in those days, but her eyes had been opened early by the Hon. Alick, and she had thought lightly of the exchange, and soon forgotten the young subaltern again, but it cost her a good deal to burn that lock of hair now. However she did it, and when these pledges of an affection that was to have been so lasting, and had passed away so soon, were all gone, leaving behind them only harmless white ashes that could tell no tales, and an aroma, that might be trusted soon to pass away also ; then Mrs. Courteney went upstairs to put on her bonnet, and as she went she told the dirty maid to call a cab for her.

The maid looked startled when she saw the boxes ; but the foreign gentleman had

made a very different impression upon her to that which she had produced upon him, and so, though she somehow connected this sudden departure with the letter she had been the means of delivering, she only thought it was no wonder "Missis had had a bad time of it with the Captain," and assisted readily enough in carrying the boxes down stairs. The girl had a drunken father herself and held an opinion not at all uncommon amongst her class, that it was the drink that did it all; what caused the drink it had never occurred to her to consider. But she helped Mrs. Courteney now obligingly enough, not saying anything about it to her mistress who was as usual busy in the kitchen, and might have remonstrated noisily and disagreeably had she known what was going on, and Ada gave the maid a larger parting gift than she would otherwise have done, and on the whole that young person was of opinion, that it was no such bad thing

that gentlemen should run away with other gentlemen's wives sometimes, for it brought luck to some people.

But when it was all over, and Mrs. Courteney had driven away from her husband's door, the dirty maid's tongue was set free, and she went down to the kitchen and gave such a highly coloured account of the whole transaction, not only what she had seen, but also what she had imagined, interspersed with so many "oh laws!" and "did you evers!" and "to think of such a things!" that she was sharply bidden to "hold her tongue, and go about her business for an idle good-for-nothing hussy as she was, and not to take no such silly notions into her head as that anyone was running away with anyone, for that Mrs. Courteney, in course, was only going to stay with her relations, and the Captain knew all about it."

For the busy landlady could not for a moment admit the possibility of such do-

ings going on under her roof, without her knowing all about them. But notwithstanding, as soon as she had got rid of her subordinate, she went upstairs and made her own investigations, and though she had before supposed the girl to be speaking the truth, when she said Mrs. Courteney had gone away and taken all her things, yet when she saw with her own eyes that they were really gone, she began to have horrid suspicions that the talkative Martha might not be so far wrong in the rest of her story. For it was very odd of Mrs. Courteney to have gone away without saying anything to her about it, even if it were only to visit her relations. However it was not desirable in a letting point of view that her house should be even talked of as giving shelter to such goings on, so she buried her suspicions in the depths of her bosom, till such time as Captain Courteney should return, and either at once put them to flight, or reduce them to disagreeable certainties.

Meanwhile Ada hurried to the station, as fast as a Southsea four-wheeler could rattle along with her and her boxes. She knew what she was doing now, but this knowledge did not make her wish it undone, it only made her wish it well over. She felt frightened of the Count, now that she was going to put herself so entirely into his power—frightened of the man, who always seemed master of the situation, whatever it was, and yet Ada knew that he had begged, prayed for her love, and that despite all he had not gained it. No, he had never gained it; as Ada Courteney jolted along in that Southsea cab, leaving for ever her husband's house that she might go with the Count Manfredi, she herself knew not whither, she wept fancying what her feelings would have been, had it been for Major O'Connor she was taking this fatal step.

She told herself she did not love him any longer; but what rapture, what trans-

ports might have been hers, had he permitted her to continue to love him ! Then she dried her tears for the cab was stopping, and there was the Count Manfredi lounging up in the most declaredly purposeless manner, so as to be ready to receive her when she alighted. Nothing could have looked less prearranged than the meeting. The Count gave just the proper start of recognition on seeing her, and then hurried forward to hand her from the cab. He had taken his ticket already, he now took hers, and superintended the labelling of her luggage, just as any casual acquaintance, whom she had chanced to meet at the station, might have done ; no one of the porters or other spectators saw the least impropriety in the whole proceeding.

They were in very good time for their train, and as they walked slowly along to get into it, they met the passengers, who had just arrived by another. “ What a

miserable invalid!" said Ada in her cold hard tones, not considering that the lady of whom she spoke would hear her. She did so, and as she passed by she looked up, and met the gaze of the Count Manfredi, who looked at her for a moment on this remark of Mrs. Courteney's, but only for a moment; then his eye was caught by a pretty young girl following the invalid. "*Ah mon Dieu!*" he exclaimed and grew pale.

"What is the matter?" said Ada, and glanced round; she saw only a young girl very ordinary looking to her mind, and the invalid lady, who had also turned round and was looking at her. Ada did not like the look, her eyes were so wild and dilated, so she turned away. "What was it?" said she indifferently.

"That poor woman has fainted," said the Count equally indifferently. "But there seem to be plenty of Samaritans, we need not run to her assistance," and they went on.

The Count had already engaged the *coupé* into which he now handed Ada, and no one in the whole station could have sworn as to what carriage she got into. He got into it himself only at the last moment, and then the train moved off, and the Count Manfredi had run away with Captain Courteney's wife; but it was all such a quiet running away, that but for the Count's distinguished foreign air, it would not have arrested the attention of the spectators even for an instant. Mrs. Courteney was very handsome, but she was English, and railway officials have no time to inquire into the delicacy of profiles, and as she happened to be very quietly dressed, no one seemed to have noticed her; but every one was ready to swear to the Count's identity when Captain Courteney went raving up to the station in the evening.

There was one person however who could have described his wife accurately

to Captain Courteney, if that could have been any satisfaction to him, and that was the poor invalid who had fainted at the station. Yes, Rosa's dress had actually touched the Count Manfredi as she passed by him, and he had not known her, had only been reminded of her for a moment by the sight of her daughter. He had gazed into her eyes, the eyes that had been once so dear to him, and that were now so drawn and weary looking, with the burden of all those wretched years that had passed since he last saw them ; he had looked into those eyes, and no electric thrill had shot through him. He had simply passed her by as though she were a stranger, and not one whose whole life ought to have been bound up in his own. But Rosa had known him well enough ; those fifteen years had not altered him as they had altered her. A miserable invalid ! as Mrs. Courteney had called her ; she was now on her way to spend the win-

ter at Bonchurch, as a sort of last resource. But she never got there; that sudden meeting at the station with the man whom she had once loved, and then learnt to hate, was too much for her weak nerves; and though she lingered on for some time longer, she never rallied sufficiently to proceed further with her journey. There was one more young girl left unprotected in the world, and that was all. The Count Manfredi was free to form new ties, for the old ones were indeed broken; he had seen Rosa for the last time, and he had felt nothing.

His one remaining wish was realised; before he left England he met Sandy Beaumont. The chances were wonderfully against it in the labyrinths of London; but some men the fates themselves seem determined to bring together. It was merely a meeting in the street, neither man held out his hand to the other, but each stopped short, each alike surprised

to see the other there. “*Charmé de vous revoir,*” murmured the Count, who first recovered himself, “remember me to your charming cousin, when you return to Ryde.”

“I am not going back,” said Sandy sturdily.

“*Et pourquoi non?*” exclaimed the Count, with the most innocent air of surprise.

“Count,” said Sandy, “you have twice insulted me. Were it not that I have now understood that my father did you an unpardonable injury, one such as no man can ever forget, I should now demand satisfaction, but—”

“*Mon bon garçon,*” said the Count, “you speak in the exaggerated manner of youth. We all have our sorrows; are you happy yourself?”

Then Sandy looked at the Count, his honest blue eyes trying to read the crafty dark ones of the other; at that moment

he caught sight of Mrs. Courteney advancing from a shop where the Count had left her to complete some purchases. She was about to rejoin him, when she saw Sandy speaking to him; she drew back with a start, a guilty flush mounting to her face. Sandy saw it, and understood at once; he felt pity for her, though his blood boiled within him, thinking how the man, who stood before him, had looked and talked to his cousin while carrying on this miserable intrigue.

“No, Count, you know I am not,” he said, in his brave truthfulness; “but I carry away with me no remorse for anything I have done either to those I love, or to those who have loved me. Till it is so with you, you are still less happy. I forgive you, M. le Comte, because you are yet more miserable than, by God’s help, I trust ever to be,” and then he passed on abruptly, and for once the Count felt he had been vanquished at his own weapons,

and that by a simple boy like Sandy Beaumont. He could not shake off the annoyance this feeling cost him, and Sandy's words were not easily forgotten; but the Count had long ago passed the Rubicon and for years his course had been down-hill, those words of Sandy's were not to hold him back, and so as time passed on they also were forgotten.

And now that we must take a last farewell of Mrs. Courteney, who has at last crossed the Rubicon also, and will figure no more in these pages, I must ask my readers to have some pity on her. Her future does not promise to be a very happy one, and her past could not furnish her with any very pleasing subjects of reflection. Yet what chance had she ever had? I am not writing a religious book, though I am weak enough to have a little moral of my own hidden within these pages, should the reader happen to find it there, or I might answer my own question. But

in truth Ada Jerningham had had many excuses, she had been sinned against for a long while before she too took to sinning. That consideration of who first brought about the sin is a very puzzling one. The Count Manfredi once fancied that in future times he might be among the regenerators of Italy. Rosa had not had a fault in her parents' eyes till that direfully romantic love affair, and how many men had not at one time or another voted poor Charlie Beaumont to be the king of good fellows !

CHAPTER XI.

KATHLEEN.

WHEN Kathleen O'Grady, getting up that Wednesday morning, saw the Flora shaking out her snowy sails, and then speeding away into the mingled mist and rain, a fresh breeze following fast, she felt as if she had indeed gained a respite. Now she would be free and mistress of herself, till the Flora glided back again from Cherbourg on those same snowy wings, that were now bearing her away. It was a very little time since this young beauty had given away her freedom, but so delicious was the feeling of having it once more, even for a few days, that it

seemed to her almost like a new sensation.

It was too damp and rainy to sally forth and do fresh damage with the rosy lips, that had seemed pressed together by a weary load during these last few days, and the eyes which had only now recovered some of their old dancing happiness. It was too deplorable a day even for her favourite seat in the verandah, so she shut herself up into her boudoir, and tried to shake off the one unhappiness that still weighed upon her, by writing the most loving of loving letters to Sandy across the water. It was such an outpouring of her feelings as she had never treated him to before, though under the circumstances it need hardly be said that it was by no means a true description of them. For one thing she did not at all imply that it was only her lover's absence — surely now that Mr. Simpson has been actually accepted by her, he must be

called so—that gave her energy enough to write this letter at all; notwithstanding that she took good care to point out to Sandy, that if he did care to come over to Clarence Villa during the next few days, there would be no danger of his running against Mr. Simpson. Yet all through that letter, she showed clearly enough her determination to stand by her engagement to that gentleman.

However, what need to speak further of it? inasmuch as it relieved Kathleen it did good, but as to Sandy, it did him no good at all, for he never got it. In that longing of youth to do the decisive deed at once, do it and have done with it, he had as far as it was in his power cut himself off at once from all his former life, from the time that he first left Portsmouth, and doing this, he had of course left no address behind him—so that letter never reached him. After it was written, Kathleen went and had quite a pleasant

chatty talk with her mother about her future prospects. True the letters to the Uncles had not been written, and were not to be so now till Mr. Simpson's return, and Lady Killowen had always said the engagement could not be considered one, till these letters were both written and answered; but though she in this way tried to keep up the delusion that all their highly related relations were entitled to a voice in the matter before it could be considered settled, both mother and daughter knew well enough that they would be left to settle the matter according to their own pleasure, unburdened by the advice of the Hon. Tom, or any other scion of the old Killowen stock. So they talked of it all as settled, entering into the minutiae, and beginning by considering the material of the wedding dress. Satin and swan's-down was distressingly common place, but then nothing could be more becoming, and as the wedding would

of course take place in the winter, it would be so suitable. Then there was the question of the bridesmaids ; Kathleen said she had quite decided on them, and mentioned one or two of her cousins, and a Lady Mary something, and a Gwendolen Du Guesclin, young ladies whom she had been friends with during her one season in town—and rather to her mother's surprise left out Sybil Mordaunt.

“ She would not know any of the others, and of course I should not be able to talk to her then, so she would feel strange. I am sure she would not like it ; besides she is in mourning still,” said Kathleen, when her mother suggested Sybil. But this was but a pretext ; in reality she had no fancy to have her friend’s large serious eyes gazing at her, while she vowed to “ love, honour, and humbly obey” Mr. Simpson.

Then she began to wonder where they

had best go for their honeymoon, and in which of Mr. Simpson's three places they would be likely to settle down afterwards. She had heard all about them by this time, and talked of them quite familiarly.

"Marmaduke—" Mr. Simpson's more dignified Christian name rather stuck in her throat as she spoke it now for the first time—"Marmaduke seems to prefer Red Rock. He says it is such a dear little snuggery. But I don't think snuggeries are much in my line," said the young beauty, who felt herself more suited to adorn a palace, than any building designed for mere comfort, such as Red Rock promised to be.

"Oh, you'll go and live in Castle Vale, of course," said her mother. "Mr. Simpson won't have been married to you a week before he'll see that is the place that is suited to you, even if he does not find it out before. But of course I shall tell him so. However, he is quite rich

enough for both, and you might spend the winter at Castle Vale, and after the season in town go down to Red Rock for sea-bathing and that sort of thing. There would be no harm in that, and it is a dear little place I daresay. Now, that house in Shropshire I should not fancy at any time."

"No; but I'd much rather come to Ryde, or some place like it for bathing. I hate being in the country unless one has a large house full of people. Now at Castle Vale I shall be able to have quite as much society as I could wish for. What will you do without me, mother, I wonder? of course you'll spend the winter with us. I mean to tell him so."

"I daresay I may come to you at Castle Vale. There will be so many people there, I shall not feel in the way. But if you are going to any snuggeries, don't expect to have much of my company. I've done quite too much gooseberry for you

before marriage, my dear, to care about going on doing it afterwards."

"Oh, mother, when you know it is always you the men come to talk to. I should never have had any fun but for you. You'll have to come if it is only to draw men for me to flirt with."

"You'll have to give up flirting now, Kathleen," said her mother, more gravely, than she had yet spoken. "Mr. Simpson is not the sort of man to stand any nonsense."

They had dawdled over their luncheon, as people will dawdle over it on rainy uninviting days, and after luncheon they settled themselves very comfortably in the drawing-room, Lady Killowen with her work as usual, Kathleen trifling with the pages of a new novel. Then the afternoon post was brought in, and this new source of interest was greeted with satisfaction by both ladies. Kathleen studied the outsides of her correspondence with

that absurd weakness people are guilty of; but the colour suddenly left her cheek, as she picked out one, written in a fine slanting foreign hand, with a perfume about it that she knew too well, and tumbling the other letters unopened on the table, she hurried out of the room.

She had often fancied herself engaged to the Count Manfredi before, the offer and its acceptance both alike taken for granted, but now she fancied that she held in her hand the very offer itself. What else could he write to her for, after what had passed between them? Her cheeks were pale, but her heart was beating high with joyful hope, as she tore open the envelope, and hastened to read the contents. The forget-me-not seal was not lost upon her, and she took it as a good omen and carefully refrained from breaking it.

She read the note through, and when

she had finished it, hardly knew whether it was the offer or not, so agitated was she; but a second reading soon made it clear to her, and her lips even grew white —those rosy lips which once the Count Manfredi had dared to kiss, and done so unchidden for his daring. She folded the note carefully in its old folds, and slipped it back into the envelope, and slowly one large hot tear after the other dropped on the forget-me-not seal, making it blurred and indistinct to her. But she saw it still, and she recollect ed that afternoon at Rome so bright with happiness and sunshine; then she went to the window, and with tearful eyes gazed out on the grey almost colourless Solent through the now fast falling rain.

“He did love me—he did hope once to marry me,” she murmured to herself; then she took the note out again, and read it through once more and wondered what was “the dark shadow of the Past”

that had come between them, and what the reasons of the present parting. These she was soon to know, would she not then know the other also? Were they not probably the same, and what could they be? “I suppose he was married all the time,” thought Kathleen, who had formed her ideas of life very largely from the novels of the day; and indeed it would be difficult to know where to form a better idea of it, if people would not only in a general way confine themselves to one particular class of novels. “I suppose he was married,” she thought sadly to herself, and then for a moment a bright smile of triumph played round her lips, as she thought that if this had not been the case he would have married her. He had cared for her then; it had not all been a mere flirtation, and nothing more. “*Qui ne vous oubliera jamais;*” those were the words she would carry away with her of that letter, and she would never

forget him, never, never. Then she thought of her old vow, that she would love him always, worthy or unworthy; that vow she would keep. She would be Mr. Simpson's wife, as he had asked her to be; but her love he had never asked for; even he surely could not be fool enough to fancy he had a claim to that.

Her love should be for ever for that one man who had first called forth the feeling in her, and Kathleen fancied herself very noble in her constancy, as these thoughts passed through her mind. There are clergymen, and district visitors, and mothers' meetings, and Sunday schools all to teach the poor to distinguish between the dictates of conscience, and the dictates of the heart, but who teaches the rich? What wonder that they know it so little, and fall down and worship before the false idol of honour that they set up for themselves? Kathleen had given Scrip-

ture lessons, before she came out, to the poor children in the Sunday School at Killowen, supported by the bounties of the great house, but no one had ever given her Scripture lessons. She had had books put into her hands, good books some of them, and some of them French novels, and she had heard people talk and talked to them herself, and thus she had formed her ideas as to what was honourable and what was not.

As to any thought about what was right and what was wrong, she had never heard any talk about that, but from Sybil. She had sometimes taken up books with something of the kind in them, but she had always looked upon these as twaddling, and laid them down accordingly. Now it was with a feeling of being very noble, and of accomplishing the sacrifice that it was laid upon her to accomplish, that she went downstairs determined to sell herself as a wife to Mr. Simpson for his

£40,000 a year, but always to remain true in her love to the one man whom she had once begun to love.

Lady Killowen had long ago finished her letters, which were short and not particularly interesting, when her daughter rejoined her; but though curious to hear Kathleen's news, she would have thought scorn of herself had she shown her curiosity, so she worked on in silence while her daughter began to detail little bits to her. At last, Kathleen said :

"The Count wrote me a few lines to say good-bye."

"Oh, indeed, does he say nothing more?" said Lady Killowen drily; she would certainly have liked to have seen the Count's letter, but she had long ago permitted her daughter's correspondence to be private, and she did not expect it to be shown to her now.

"No, only sorrow at going away, and that sort of thing," said Kathleen, but

her manner conveyed much more than her words.

Lady Killowen knew well enough which letter it was that had taken Kathleen out of the room, but she still felt very doubtful indeed as to what was in that letter.

Sybil came to see Kathleen that afternoon, and the two girls had five o'clock tea together in Kathleen's boudoir; for though Lady Killowen saw no sense in it, and would not permit it in the drawing-room, she had no objection to other peoples' spoiling their digestion in that or any other way if they chose to do so. Sybil had come to see Kathleen because Sandy's last words had rung in her ears and would not let her rest; but she had shrunk much from doing so. Why should she, poor sad-coloured insect that she was, seek out this gay butterfly who gathered love like honey from all she fluttered near, even from him, who—but Sybil hated herself for this idea, and was

all the more determined on going to see her friend, because it gave her so much pain to do so.

The conversation between them was very stiff at first; both were full of subjects they did not care to speak of to each other; but gradually they slid off to old times, and then they grew more loving to each other, recalling little instances of the time when first they met, and the kiss at parting was more affectionate than that at meeting had been. But as Sybil gave Kathleen that kiss, a cold shudder passed through her, and a mist came over her eyes, and had her friend not caught her, she would have fallen to the ground fainting. As it was she had to lie down on the sofa, and drink some wine, and submit to coddling for a little; but she would not be still long, a restlessness had come over her that seemed to make it impossible to her to rest. So she soon got up again, and pressed another hurried

passionate kiss upon her beautiful friend's cheek, as she now really left her.

"I don't know what was the matter with Sybil to-day," said Kathleen to her mother, "she looked so pale and unhappy, and when she went away, she kissed me as if she were going to do something desperate. It gave me quite a chokey feeling."

"I suppose she was not well, and that made her faint—it is this horrid weather I daresay," said Lady Killowen. Between them, women and weather have to account for a great many mischances of this life.

Two days after this, while Lady Killowen and her daughter were resting themselves in the twilight before the great exertion of going up-stairs to take off their things, and then dress for dinner, Lady Long and Miss Long were announced. They came in full of apologies for calling so late, but really "dear Lady Killowen was so seldom

at home, and they did so wish to find her.” There did not seem to be anything at first to account for this solicitude, so Lady Killowen took it very quietly, valuing it at what it deserved. “They want to find out if the Flora has gone away, because Kathleen has refused Mr. Simpson,” she guessed, priding herself, as she did so, on her insight into the little weaknesses human nature is prone to; but Lady Long did not seem in any hurry to speak of the object of her visit, if it was the Flora.

“What a shocking thing this is about the Count Manfredi!” she said at last after a good deal of preliminary talk. “Of course after that dreadful scene at my house, when he behaved so badly to Mr. Beaumont, I never thought of seeing anything more of him—but a man so lately met everywhere in society—it quite shakes one’s confidence in everyone.”

“Why, what has happened?” said Lady

Killowen, coolly. “ He isn’t dead ? ” she added more anxiously, as her old fears about Sandy and a duel rushed back upon her ; Lady Long could not speak of it in this way if he had killed Sandy, but could it be that Sandy had killed him ?

“ No, not dead ; better if he were really I think. But he has run off with that wretched Mrs. Courteney, a horrid woman, who was always coming over to the bands, all paint, with almost bare shoulders too,” and Lady Long gave a little shudder, and drew her cloak tighter round her own skinny shoulders.

“ You are not fond of music then ? ” said Kathleen, making conversation in the most painstaking school-room girl style to Miss Long, “ but then of course you draw. I wish I could, but perspective is so difficult to understand. You don’t attempt oils, do you ? ” asked she, knowing very well that Miss Long did, and was very proud of her rather wooden performances,

and then she slid off to the Academy last spring, and talked about that as much as she could. She had never done young lady talk so conscientiously before, but Nita watched her with no friendly gaze the while, and was not to be done out of the promised pleasure of seeing the victim writhe; so she waited her opportunity, and when Kathleen paused at last, racking her brain vainly for some fresh subject, she, contrary to her usual custom, went out of her way so far as to start one herself.

“Isn’t it dreadful for poor Captain Courteney?” she said; not that she felt any pity for that unfortunate officer herself, but though she could hardly believe that Kathleen had heard what her mother had been saying, she did not think it safe to try quite the same beginning.

“Does he mind?” said Kathleen indifferently.

Then Nita saw that Kathleen had heard.

"They say he has nearly lost his senses with grief," said she impressively.

"Lucky man to have any senses to lose. Not many men have I should say. However, with all his senses he does not seem to have been a match for the Count," and Kathleen laughed; but that laugh was impolitic, for she herself started at its sound, it was so hard and harsh.

At last the Longs went away, but not till dinner was actually on the table; there was not even time to dress, and so she had to sit opposite her mother making believe to eat, and keeping up appearances before the servants without having had a moment to think upon the startling intelligence she had just received. At last when dessert was on the table, and the servants had left the room, Lady Killowen asked :

"Did Count Manfredi say anything about this in his letter to you, Kathleen?"

“ He alluded to it,” answered her daughter firmly. “ Of course he could not do more.” Then after dinner she pleaded a bad headache, and went upstairs and was alone at last.

She understood now the reasons of their parting for ever, and could no longer console herself with the idea that the Count loved her enough to wish to make her his wife, but for the miserable shadow from his past. She thought of that no longer; the reasons for the present parting were enough for her. She threw herself upon the sofa, and lay there with burning eyes and throbbing brow, and she thought how the Longs had come to gloat over her suffering; and her one comfort was that she was engaged to Mr. Simpson, and for the first time she wished this generally known. But it would be soon, and she should be able to bear it all better after the first she supposed.

CHAPTER XII.

MAJOR DE LANCEY GOES TO CLARENCE VILLA.

WHEN Major De Lancey rejoined his regiment after his short leave, almost the first news he heard was about Sandy Beaumont. "Some more of the beautiful Miss O'Grady's handiwork," he thought to himself, and formed a harsher judgment even than that he already entertained of our poor Ryde beauty. But he said nothing about the silly moth this time; that simile had struck him as very appropriate in the case of the fair boy Earl, who had fluttered in such an uncalled for manner into the flames; but he did not believe that his sturdy straightforward

subaltern had done so equally without provocation. First, there was the cousinship, and the necessary consequent intimacy to excuse him, and besides Major De Lancey had seen the two quite often enough together, to know something of the way in which the foolish young fellow had been lured on to his destruction.

But when among the other letters awaiting his return he found that from Sandy Beaumont, with the enclosure for Lady Killowen, Major De Lancey swore as violent an oath as that generally civil tongued officer had probably ever given voice to. There had been foul play somewhere, he felt sure ; Sandy was too honest to have professed to sell out on account of money difficulties, if he had not really done so, yet he mentioned nothing but the one debt to Major De Lancey ; and his former belief that that money had been borrowed either for Lady

Killowen, or Kathleen herself, recurred to De Lancey's mind. "It shall not be," he said to himself, "I will put a stop to it. That fine young fellow shall not go to the dogs for any money he owes me," and as there was no clue in Sandy's letter to himself as to his present whereabouts, he determined to go over at once to Ryde, to see if he could get any information from that addressed to Lady Killowen.

In his then state of feeling towards her ladyship, he would much have preferred writing to ask her, but that would lose time, which was of value now, and then he glanced at the date of Sandy's letter and began to despair of saving him. He said he had sent in his papers before writing, and by this time probably he would have got the price of his commission. But all the same Major De Lancey could not bear not to make the attempt to save him, if it were still possible, so he went on board one of the Ryde

steamboats, hoping at Clarence Villa to hear of some address where he would be likely to find Sandy. It was not a little thing that would have made young Beaumont leave the service, Major De Lancey knew, and Sandy himself said so in the few lines which he had thought necessary to write. Sandy had never been enthusiastic about his profession ; indeed, like most young Englishmen, he had taken pains in a general way more to conceal his feelings than to express them ; but though he had often in his careless way jested about exchanging, should the old 168th. be ordered abroad, there had always been that in his manner that showed his heart was in the service, and Major De Lancey knew it could have been no light trial to him to part with all his hopes of military distinction. He said himself that, but for feeling it was now impossible for him ever to stand free of debt without the sale of his commission, he would not thus

have parted with it; but that from a recent change of circumstances he found that he never would be able to do so otherwise, and that in borrowing the money of Major De Lancey, he had been trusting to what he now felt he never ought to have trusted, though at the moment he had blinded himself to the wrongness of the action. For Sandy had learnt to see that he never ought to have borrowed this money from a friend, who asked neither interest nor security, on the chance (he now knew that it had been only a chance) that Kathleen would one day be rich enough to be able to repay him.

He had shrunk from vexing his friend by saying that it was only the debt to himself which obliged him to sell out, so had touched on this as lightly as possible, consistent with truth, and De Lancey was still meditating in his own mind as to whether there were other debts or not,

when he rang at the door of Clarence Villa.

Lady Killowen was alone, when he was shown in to her, and with very little preface he handed her Sandy's letter. It would have been difficult to say whether she was most grieved or angry at first, but free spoken as usual, she exclaimed at once :

"It is all rubbish about the money. I know what it is. It is all Kathleen's doing. Kathleen," she cried in a louder voice, and at her call the beauty of Ryde appeared from a secret nook in the verandah, where she had been sitting, unconscious of what was going on within, and literally behind her back.

Major De Lancey looked at the fair enchantress as she entered the room, pausing for a moment in the window to know why she was wanted. Her golden hair was rough and untidy, her cheeks flushed, a garden hat dangling by one of its ribbons in her hand, both of which

were gloveless. Nothing could have looked more thoroughly natural, more unadornedly beautiful than Kathleen, as she stood there in her simple morning dress, her large blue eyes wearing a weary look of sorrow; and Major De Lancey voted himself a brute on the instant to have thought of her as the designing flirt, he had been mentally naming her, while crossing over to Ryde. She walked forward and shook hands with him, without any of that company air of being pleased to see him, which young ladies in general seem to think befitting the occasion.

“What is it, mother?” she said. “Oh, a letter from Sandy,” and her face brightened, and she held out her hand eagerly for it; for not a little had it grieved her not to have heard from him since that last dreadful interview.

But her mother held it back from her. Whatever Lady Killowen might be with

her nephew, she was very angry with her daughter.

“Kathleen, what did you mean by refusing Sandy, when he was last over here, and telling me nothing about it?”

“I never refused him, mother; he never offered to me,” said Kathleen imploringly, as she looked up at her mother’s face angrily incredulous. “Indeed if he had taken half the pains to offer, that he took to tell me he would never do so, I believe I should have accepted him,” said Kathleen with a dreary smile.

Then Lady Killowen seemed to believe her and handed her Sandy’s letter, and Major De Lancey could not but notice that Kathleen glanced round, as she took it, and carefully sat down where her face could not be seen; but he could still see the back of her throat, and he saw how scarlet that grew after she had read the first few words, and before she got to the end of

the letter he heard the short quick sobs, which she took no pains to conceal, as she hurried up to Lady Killowen :

“ Oh, mother, mother, you must stop him—there is time yet ? ” she asked turning to Major De Lancey.

“ I don’t know,” he replied, “ I came over here, as I wished to hear if he told Lady Killowen where he was to be found, that I might start immediately to try and see him. I’m only just back from leave now, or I should have come sooner ; but the Colonel would, I don’t doubt, give me an extension if it were likely to do Beaumont any good.”

“ And you’ll tell him not to mind about the money, mother will pay it for him. Oh, mother, you must,” as Lady Killowen seemed about to interfere here.

“ It will not be necessary,” said Major De Lancey, “ the only large debt—if not as I believe about the only one is to myself, and that I should only go for the

purpose of telling him not to consider—if you could but tell me where to go.”

“He says he shall go out to Australia,” said Lady Killowen, laying a savage emphasis upon the word Australia, “and he only tells me he shall go up to town first. But you can see what he says. Give Major De Lancey the letter, Kathleen.”

Major De Lancey was surprised on reading it; it did not at all fit in with his idea of Sandy’s character and preconceived notions of the present case. Sandy attributed his selling out simply to the one debt—though without mentioning whom it was to—and he expressed his sorrow more deeply even than in the other note. He had a faint hope, indeed, that he might in this way yet save Kathleen from the wretched fate she was preparing for herself. But Major De Lancey, believing that the money had had something to do with her, had expected to find but

little, if any mention of it, and all expression of sorrow devoted to the leaving something else not his regiment. He looked at Kathleen turning away her tearful face, and sobbing every now and then spasmodically, and he voted himself a brute for all the bad things he had thought of her. But he could not find any clue to Sandy's whereabouts in Lady Killowen's letter, any more than in his own. "He does not even say what part of Australia the is thinking of going to. But have you a *Times*? we might see what ships are sailing about this time."

"Yes," said Kathleen through her tears, "I am looking; but I can't see—I don't make it out quite—you don't think he'd go to Sydney, do you?"

"Why not?" and Major De Lancey took the paper, which she handed to him half unwillingly.

"The Dunbar Castle—" began Kathleen, and then sobbed again.

Just then the servant came in with the letters by the afternoon post.

“Oh, this is all right!” exclaimed Lady Killowen joyfully. “Here is another from him. Now we shall see, where he is. Good heavens, when did he write? yesterday! and he says ‘we sail early to-morrow in the Dunbar Castle,’ that’s to-day of course. Then there’s no hope—I never was so sorry about anything in my life. He only writes about that stupid dog which he said he meant to leave with me. Poor dear Rover, I am glad Sandy will have one friend with him.”

Yes, Gaskell was right; Lady Killowen would rather her nephew should have his dog with him, than that she should have it herself, fond though she was of dogs, and beauty though Rover was.

Major De Lancey did not stay long; his visit had proved a fruitless one, and Lady Killowen seemed too genuinely unhappy at the expatriation of her favourite

nephew to care to talk about it. When Kathleen left the room he did not quite know ; but by the time he had understood the news this second letter brought, she was no longer there. Thinking it all over afterwards, it seemed to him that she had shown more grief than was at all natural unless she were in love with her cousin, which at the same time he did not think possible, considering her frank confession at the beginning. She must be in some way guilty as regarded Sandy. All belief in her guilt had passed away from him while he was in her presence, but now he no longer saw her, it came back to him, and he thought of her once more as, "*La belle dame sans merci.*"

Meanwhile Kathleen had rushed upstairs, and locking herself into her little room, prone on the ground almost where Sandy had knelt to her that fatal Monday afternoon, she was weeping as no "*belle*

dame sans merci" ever had wept, or could weep. Then in desperation she sprang from the ground, and wrote, now that it was too late to write, a few abrupt passionate lines to Mr. Simpson breaking off all engagement between them. It relieved her for a few moments, but what was the use of it now? and she tore the note into little bits, almost as soon as she had written it.

"But I cannot marry him now," she moaned out, with a feeling of wild loathing for Mr. Simpson fast creeping over her. "Oh, Sandy, did you know I couldn't now? did you think this was the only way to save me? Oh, but you have broken my heart, oh, Sandy, Sandy!"

Afterwards she went down stairs, and read his short letter to her mother. She had only heard the bare fact before, that he had started for Sydney that morning.

"You told Sandy you were engaged to

Mr. Simpson," said Lady Killowen thoughtfully.

"Yes, mother," and Kathleen seemed to think too, looking rather nervously at her mother every now and then. At last she said, "I think I'll write a note for him to get directly the Flora comes back."

"What to say?"

"To break it all off. It was all a mistake my ever thinking I could marry him."

"That is just like you, Kathleen. Not that I mind whether you do or not. Pray do you mean to wait though till Sandy comes back from Australia with a fortune?"

But Kathleen was in no humour for joking. "Sandy will never make a fortune," she said gloomily.

"It was very foolish of him certainly going out in this sudden sort of way. I have no patience with him, asking no-

body's advice. I always used to give him credit for common sense."

"I never thought him half so wise before," and Kathleen sighed heavily. "Oh what a weary world it is ! I wish I could go out to Australia too."

"A pity you didn't marry Sandy first then, my dear. I dare say you could have set up housekeeping together out there very nicely. You're admirably suited for a settler's wife."

"Oh don't, mother, don't. I am suited for nothing—nothing," repeated Kathleen passionately. "No one can hate and despise me half as much as I do myself."

"Probably not; for I never met with anyone yet who did either. Come, Kathleen, you are only spoiling your eyes, and you will have to use them again, if you throw over Mr. Simpson ; I would not cry about him too, if I were you. He'll get into a dreadful rage and swear horribly, I

daresay ; but I shall have to bear all that. You need never see him again, if you don't like, so go now and write to him as prettily as you can, for the Flora may be back any moment. I only wonder she isn't already. As for Sandy, you need not make yourself unhappy about him ; he is safe to fall on his legs, wherever he is, and I know several people out at Sydney I'll write to about him ; and if you write him a nice long cousinly letter, my dear, telling him Mr. Simpson is out of the way, and that you are only waiting for him, why he'd get it very soon after he arrived at Sydney. Oh, Sandy will be as happy as a king with lots of cows and sheep to drive about, and a good horse to ride after them on, and Rover by his side to worry them, and he is quite the right sort to get on in the colonies. I think it is a much better thing for him than just hanging on in the army without a chance of getting a penny."

"Oh, but mother, you don't know all," said poor Kathleen, who had gone to the writing table to begin her letter to Mr. Simpson, but seemed quite incapable of doing so.

"I daresay I don't," said Lady Killowen grimly, "but I know it would be all nonsense your marrying Sandy, and if this has made you take a dislike to Mr. Simpson, you can easily make a better match. Only I won't stop on at Ryde now. This east wind is making me shiver already, and I am sure it must be horribly cold here in the winter; besides the place is getting dreadfully empty. No, I shan't take on the house any more; fortunately our time is up very soon, so we'll just go abroad again—to Pau, and next spring I shall be out of mourning, and I'll take you out in London myself, and you'll soon find a better husband than Mr. Simpson."

"Only we shall have to raise the wind to

do all this," said Kathleen pettishly, for she felt like a child, whom people console during an agonising operation, by the promise of future sugar plums.

"I should think I am old enough to manage my own affairs without your interference. Make haste, do, Kathleen, and write your letter—if you're going to write. If you would only finish it now, you might read aloud that new novel to me after dinner. I want something to put Sandy out of my head. Dear me, what plagues men are! what should he go to Australia for? I am sure it is a pity I can't marry him myself, for I believe I am much fonder of him than you are, and I should make a capital settler's wife."

"Yes, indeed," said Kathleen, more cheerfully than she had yet spoken. "It's a great pity you should have been wasted on being a Countess, mother. Anybody could be that. Suppose we go out and

settle together now. I am sure you could turn your hand to anything."

"Yes, but you could not. I must get you off my hands first; then perhaps I will go out and be Sandy's housekeeper, as I can't be his wife," and Lady Killowen laughed a rather hysterical laugh; it had been all she could do to keep the tears back for some time past. For she loved Sandy like her own son, though she would notwithstanding have been nearly beside herself with anger, if the making him such had ever been seriously suggested to her.

But her mother's laugh set Kathleen off sobbing: "Oh, poor Sybil, poor Sybil!" she moaned out, and Lady Killowen was too much afraid of being found out to be crying herself to ask what she meant; so they left off talking, and by degrees Kathleen dried her tears, and wrote a much calmer and more dignified note to Mr. Simpson than the one she had so hastily composed before

and torn up. And of this note the contents mattered a good deal, though it also was never to reach its destination, whatever pains Kathleen might take to send it. When she had written it, she rang the bell, and desired the servant to take it to the hotel Mr. Simpson always put up at, to be given to him directly the Flora came back. Then after coffee she did read the new novel aloud, and went on doing so mechanically, till after sundry lookings at the clock, Lady Killowen at last considered it late enough to justify them in going to bed.

“Oh, how poor Sybil must hate me, and she does not know all,” repeated Kathleen over and over to herself, as she tossed about sleeplessly. “Poor dear, Sybil!”

She wished she had told somebody about the money, for she longed to have some one who knew all, if only to see if they would still think her fit to

speak to ; but she could not tell anyone now. It was no use now ; she had no money to send to Sandy, and she did not believe that her mother had any either, for all that she said about Pau and London. Besides Sandy would not care for it, now that he had sold his commission ; for Kathleen had always been her cousin's confidante, she had heard all the dreams of his young ambition, and she knew better than anyone how much it must have cost him to give up his profession.

“ Oh, Sandy, you have broken my heart,” she said to herself, “ I could have borne all about the Count Manfredi, and I *could* have married Mr. Simpson, and never let anyone know how miserable I was. But now I *can’t* marry Mr. Simpson, and I don’t care who sees how wretched I am. Only I am so sorry for Sybil, why did not Sandy care for her ? couldn’t he see how much more worth she is than

I am ! I am sure she cares for him. Poor dear Sybil, how she would despise me, if she knew all," and then it all began over again.

CHAPTER XIII.

SHOCKING NEWS.

LADY KILLOWEN went next day to ask after Sybil, whom she had not seen since the day that she fainted at Clarence Villa. Kathleen would not go out, and her mother did not press her ; but she went to see Sybil by herself, for she was fond of her, feeling a great pity for her too in her loneliness and poverty. Lady Killowen was wonderfully kind-hearted for all her occasional glumness and sarcasm ; she did not go about seeking out sorrow and suffering as some good women do, that they may relieve it, but any sorrow or suffering that came in her way she

must do her best to relieve, and that is far more than can be said of many people. Now she did not go only to inquire after Sybil, though she knew this little attention on her part would be pleasing to the lonely young girl ; but though she had no reason to think Sybil was at all in love with Sandy, she thought she had discerned a girlish fancy for him, and so she went chiefly that she might tell her the sad news about him, and that they might console with each other about it. But Sybil disappointed Lady Killowen. She really did seem ill, and had not been out of the house since she went to Clarence Villa, having taken cold that wretched rainy day, and being afraid to trust herself out in the cutting east wind which had set in since the weather had turned fine, and she had a nasty little hacking cough of no pleasant sound. Lady Killowen pitied her a good deal while she told her about Sandy, for her cough really did seem very

troublesome ; but she was disappointed at not meeting with the sympathy she had expected. Sybil said she was very sorry to hear about Sandy's going away, for Lady Killowen's sake ; it must be a great grief to her, "and to Kathleen too," she added more doubtfully, and then she coughed several times and she expressed no sorrow on her own account.

"I thought you would be sorry to hear it," said Lady Killowen, "you and he have always been great friends."

"No one could help being friends with Mr. Beaumont," said Sybil, in her quiet guarded way, and then she coughed again. "I daresay he will get on very well in Australia though."

"He'd have got on very well at home, if he'd only stayed in the army." Lady Killowen felt quite provoked at anyone's attempting to console her. "No, I could not have been more sorry about it, if he had been my own son."

"I suppose he has always been like a son to you," said Sybil.

Well, Lady Killowen had done what she intended ; she had inquired after Sybil, and she had told her all about Sandy in the kindest way, giving her all the particulars she knew ; she could not quarrel with her now, because Sybil would express no sorrow at hearing them.

"Don't come to the door with your cold, my dear," she said, "you must stay here by the fire."

Then Sybil's aunt went to the door with Lady Killowen ; she felt as if she could not but show this sign of respect to the Countess, with whom she was but very slightly acquainted herself, the elderly Miss Mordaunt not being at all in Lady Killowen's way.

"Sybil is looking very ill," she now said, "have you had a doctor to see her ?"

"No, do you really think she requires

one?" said the maiden lady. "Of course with such delicate parents she gives me a great deal of anxiety; but her cough was much worse this morning than it has been yet. I can't think what made it so bad, she has been keeping in the house for several days."

"I should send for a doctor," said Lady Killowen decidedly. "She'll never stand the winter in England beginning in this way. Indeed I can't think how anyone can. We mean to go abroad almost immediately, this last cold has quite decided me," and Lady Killowen shivered as the sharp north-easter swept in through the open door.

Miss Mordaunt went back to her niece, wondering if she really did require a doctor, and thinking she would consult her herself. "She knows so much more about illness than I do," said the aunt, who having been the delicate one of her family all her youth, and having been

taken care of then, had hardly known a day's illness since she grew up, while her strong brothers and sisters had all died off before her. But Sybil was not in the drawing-room when her aunt went back to it, so she had to put off consulting her for the present; and when she appeared again for the early dinner, which Miss Mordaunt always stuck to summer and winter, she indignantly rejected the idea of a doctor, and seemed almost angry when she heard that Lady Killowen had suggested it. "What could make her think I wanted one? My cough is nothing, if it were not for this wind I should go out. I must to-morrow any how; there's a poor woman I must go to see before church, and my cough is nothing."

"I daresay it will do you good to get a little fresh air," said the aunt, "but I don't like your poking about in those

dirty cottages, you won't get fresh air there."

Oh the way English people talk about fresh air! are they always inclined for iced water, that they think iced air must be so beneficial in all cases?

Sybil did go to the poor woman next morning, but she did not go to church afterwards, for at Mrs. Bartlett's cottage she heard some rather startling intelligence. Dame Bartlett's son, who lived at Ventnor, had come over early that morning about a little job he had got to do at Ryde, and he had brought the news. Mrs. Bartlett was so full of it, that she did not pour forth all her usual catalogue of unpleasant symptoms, but began at once :

"Miss Mordaunt," she said, "have you heard the shocking news? There's a poor gen'elman been and tumbled over the cliffs somewhere between Ventnor and Bonchurch, and his body is all in pieces,

and they *do* say, Miss, it was done a' purpose by her who was walking with him."

"Oh, how very shocking!" said Sybil, but she had no fancy for horrid murders and such tit-bits, and expressed no curiosity.

"I can't rightly recollect the name," said the old woman, who was determined not to be done out of telling her story, "leastways my son didn't tell me, I believe, now I come to think on it. But it was a gen'elman as owned a yacht, he said; the Flory, or some such name, he called it."

"The Flora!" exclaimed Sybil in horror.

"Yes, that's it, Miss Mordaunt; the Flory, my son said it was. The poor gen'elman had only landed from the yacht to take a little walk because it was so cold; and that young woman he used to take about with him wished to warm herself,

she said, and they saw them from the yacht walking along the cliff, and then they turned a corner, and they didn't see them no more—and next she comes running back, all alone, screaming out he'd fallen over the cliff. But they *do* say she knocked him over in one of her tantrums, the sailors say she was a rare one for tantrums. My son was aboard the yacht at the time, and heard all about it; and he *do* say, Miss, it was along of a young lady at Ryde he was engaged to, and she would not hear of it. But you didn't know the gen'elman did'ee, Miss Mordaunt? You look so ter-ble pale to be *sure.*"

"I did know him a little," said Sybil, "and I have often seen him about here, and it seems so shocking. But are you quite sure the name of the yacht was the Flora?"

"Yes, Miss, the Flory; that was the name, sure enough. But here's my son,

he can tell you better nor I can, for he was aboard her at the time," and then Jem Bartlett came in, and said not only that the yacht was the *Flora*, but that the gentleman was Mr. Simpson, and he had seen the dead body.

"But he didn't fall; it was she as done it," said Jem Bartlett doggedly.

"It seems too horrible," said poor Sybil. She had been flushed and excited when she came in, but now she looked very pale and ill, and seemed hardly to have enough energy even to get up and go away.

"It's a bad business; there's not much good from beginning to end on't that I can see," said Jem Bartlett, "and it was all along of a young lady in Ryde. She'd been going on about it all the morning like mad, the young woman had. It was long Tom as told me, and he has waited on the young lady, when she come off to the yacht, so he knows, and a grand

young lady she is, he says too, tall and with beautiful long yellow hair.”

“I must be going,” said Sybil faintly, “there’s the church bell already,” and then as she got up to go away, she transacted the real business of her visit with the old woman.

The cold wind blew almost refreshingly upon her fevered cheek, as she got outside the cottage, and walked slowly along the road. She felt very weak, and ill, and *very* miserable, and this sudden death, or *murder* of Mr. Simpson shocked her very much; she longed to get into the church and cast her sorrows from her, but her feet seemed weighted with lead. “‘All is well that ends well,’ ” she said, with a pained smile wreathing round her white lips, “how I’ve always hated that play ! I wonder what is the real difference between me and Helen, I do feel like her at the beginning, I am afraid ; but I could never go to Australia after him, and I

daresay, going to Paris was nearly as bad in her days." But as she got to the church door her mind went back to the news she had just heard, and she paused. What would Kathleen feel at hearing this news? "Never mind, what does it matter?" she said to herself, "if she *is* engaged to him (for Sybil had no reason to disbelieve what the rest of Ryde believed, and since she had heard about Sandy, she thought she *had* a reason for believing it; for what else could account for his sudden going away?) if she *is* engaged to Mr. Simpson, she must have no heart at all, none; it won't hurt her however she hears of his death," and she was about to enter the church, but conscience whispered, "Do as you would be done by," and conscience gained the day; and Sybil turned resolutely away from the church, and walked sadly and slowly to Clarence Villa.

Kathleen was sitting in her usual chair

in her boudoir, when Sybil was shewn in ; what she was doing was not very apparent, and her eyes looked rather red and swollen, and her hair had already a rough dishevelled appearance, early though it was in the morning. She was very miserable, not only heart-broken, as she said herself, but for the time her pride was crushed utterly, and Kathleen was not herself without her pride.

“ Dearest Sybil,” she said, coming forward with outstretched hands, but not kissing her; somehow both girls shrank from that. “ Mother brought home such a piteous account of your cough yesterday, I am quite glad to see you are well enough to come out. I must light the fire though for you, for it is horribly cold, is it not ? I don’t know why I have not had it lighted before.” Then Kathleen lighted the fire, and while she was stooping over it, pretending to arrange it, she thought it best to begin the dreadful subject

herself. “Isn’t it very sad about poor Sandy, Sybil?”

“Very sad,” said Sybil simply, and she began to think herself very foolish ever to have thought Kathleen could care about anything that had happened to Mr. Simpson; just now, of course, she could think of nothing but Sandy. For when she saw Kathleen, Sybil could not believe it possible any longer that she was engaged to Mr. Simpson.

“Oh, Sybil, if you only knew how miserable I am, you would forgive me,” said Kathleen, rising from stooping over the fire, and now facing her friend.

“Forgive you,” faltered Sybil, “my dear Kathleen, what have I——”

“Oh you know—or rather you don’t know half. Sit down, dearest,” and she drew round her favourite chair to the fire, and forced Sybil into it, and then crouching herself on the ground at her feet, she

said, “I don’t deserve ever to speak to you again, Sybil.”

“Don’t, Kathleen, don’t,” and Sybil stooped over her, and clasped one of her friend’s hands in hers. “I know you are very unhappy, and it has nothing to do with me, that I should forgive you.”

“Yes, yes, it has; for you knew how to value him always, dear, dear Sandy. Oh, Sybil, he ought to have cared for you, and he cared for me instead, and I—I have been a devil to him.”

“Kathleen!”

“It is true, you don’t know all; no one does, and no one ever will. For I shall never tell, it would be of no use to him now, and he will never tell; I know that. Oh, Sybil, why are other men so different? why have they no honour, no anything like him?”

“I think there are many very good men in the world,” said Sybil in her grave precise tones; for she felt very ill, and it was

very difficult to her to speak at all. But she stroked her friend's golden hair caressingly, as Kathleen leant her head against her, while she crouched beside her in her self-abasement, her beautiful face hidden, and her eyes bent upon the ground. Sybil caressed her in silence for a few minutes, then she said very gravely: "If you are thinking of the Count Manfredi, or——"

"You have heard about him," groaned Kathleen, covering her face with her hands now.

"No, what has he done?"

Then Kathleen uncovered her face and sat upright. "Oh, have not you heard?" said she in her usual careless tones, "he and that Mrs. Courteney, you know her, Sybil! yes, you do—with the beautiful white neck, and exquisite profile—"

"Oh, horrid woman!" ejaculated Sybil; but Kathleen went on without heeding the interruption.

“They’re gone off together. To Italy, I believe, and the husband is said to be out of his mind, instead of thinking he has had a good riddance. Foolish man, that he is, not to be glad to be rid of such a woman as would go off with the Count Manfredi! But I suppose people think I’m breaking my heart for him, just because we kept up our old Roman flirtation a little. Did you think I was engaged to him like the rest of the world? That horrid fire! it won’t burn. How troublesome fires are when one first begins having them!” and Kathleen bent forward, and remorselessly poked the poor thing out, and then began stuffing in scraps of paper to repair the damage, she had done. “One comfort is, we shan’t have much more to do with them just now, for we are going to Pau almost immediately. Mother is dying to be off, now the cold wind has begun. I always knew she would not like

Ryde in the winter, though she did talk so much of staying on here."

"There was some one else I thought you were engaged to," said Sybil, speaking very slowly, and looking gravely at Kathleen. She supposed she might as well tell her the news, as she had come to Clarence Villa on purpose; though the reviving friendship she had begun to feel during the wild penitence about Sandy, had already begun to vanish again at these last words about the Count Manfredi, which even Sybil, with all her affectionate trust in her friend, could not quite swallow.

"Who?" asked Kathleen defiantly, "Not that brute Mr. Simpson? I believe the world is kind enough to talk of me with him, too," and she laughed harshly.

"Oh, don't, don't!" said Sybil with a look of sudden pain.

"Why *he* has not found favour in your

eyes surely, Sybil. I could understand your being sorry about Lord Faversham—poor boy, how ill he does seem to be! But you're not going to pity '*ce bête*, M. Simpson' as Ida Zieri always used to call him, are you?" Kathleen was no longer crouching on the floor now; she was reclining in a comfortable chair, and looked like an ideal young lady of the nineteenth century, without a care beyond getting her bonnet small enough, and her skirts long enough.

"He is dead," said Sybil shortly.

"My dear Sybil, how theatrical you are! you quite frighten me," and Kathleen became suddenly pale. "The Flora has not gone down, has she?" and Kathleen recollected their last ride together, and how in her ignorance she had mistaken the rain coming up from the westward for a storm brewing there; and thought what an escape it would be, if the storm came on and the Flora went down

in it, and how notwithstanding she never could be glad of her escape, if it came about in this way. Now that she had escaped without the Flora's going down, she would be sorry indeed to hear that she had done so.

"No; the Flora's all right. Mr. Simpson has fallen over one of the cliffs on the other side of the island, and been killed; some people say that an unhappy girl who used to go about with him knocked him over—in a fit of jealousy. She was alone with him at the time. I came to tell you because I thought you might be interested in him, and then perhaps it would be better that you should hear of it from me than from some stranger. Now I may as well go, for I know nothing more. Good bye."

"Sybil," said Kathleen, rising from her seat, and standing before her in all the queenliness of her beauty, "this is all very well. But tell me, are you going away

without shaking hands with me, because you think—”

“I did not know I had not shaken hands with you,” said Sybil humbly, coming back, and holding out her hand. “I thought perhaps you would rather I should go.”

“Oh, go, go!” said Kathleen wildly, and without seeing the proffered hand, “go and think yourself happy to have escaped from my friendship, without suffering more than you have. You see it is not everyone that escapes so well,” and she laughed a wild harsh laugh.

“Kathleen, my dear Kathleen!” and Sybil passed an arm round her, and led her unresistingly to the sofa. “What can I do to comfort you? I am so sorry.”

“Sorry for a murderer!” and Kathleen pushed her away impatiently. “As if I did not know, what you implied in your quiet precise tones. In a fit of jealousy did she push him over? jealousy of whom?

as if I did not know that you meant me ?
Pray, who told you this beautiful story ?
did they mention my name ?”

“ No, they did not mention your name,” said Sybil with dignity, “ and I don’t know what you mean by implying anything. Of course I meant you to understand that it was jealousy of you, though I thought it better for both of us, if we were to continue friends, that it should not be said in so many words between us. I daresay I was wrong, but I wanted to tell you the whole story that you might consider how you had better act at once, and not hear anything dreadful from any chance person afterwards. But I would not have told you so abruptly, only after the way you spoke of that poor man just now, I could not think that you cared for him.”

“ Cared for him ! oh my God ! But it is too dreadful. You have not told me who told you, Sybil ?” she added quickly.

"An old woman in my district; her son came over by one of the early trains. He was on board the *Flora* at the time."

"And why do they think that girl knocked him over?"

"I don't know; perhaps they have no reason. The old woman said it was in one of her tantrums, and I believe they had been quarrelling. It is all such a horrid story, I hardly like to speak of it, only I thought it best to come and tell you."

"Thank you very much, dear Sybil; it was very good of you, and you must forgive my being so strange just now. It startled me so much. He did offer to me, you see, and it might have been that I was engaged to him at this moment, and so many dreadful things have happened lately."

"Yes," said Sybil wearily, "then you had refused him? I am glad of that. But of course you feel it very much—a

man you have known so intimately lately. Is it not dreadful to think of his dying so suddenly too? But, Kathleen, I hope you won't think me unkind, only I feel so tired somehow. I think I should like to go home."

" Dear Sybil ; you do look ill too. It was very kind of you to come and tell me, very kind. I had rather have heard of it from you than from anyone. You will be my friend still, won't you, dearest ?"

" Yes, I have promised," said Sybil rather vaguely ; she did not say whom she had promised, and she did not indeed quite know what she was saying ; but she let Kathleen kiss and thank her, all very much as if she did not hear it, and then she walked home very quickly, with a bright red colour on her cheeks that was very unusual to them, coughing as she met the north-easter, cold and piercing round the corners of the streets. She went home, and went to bed, and soon

she became delirious ; and in her delirium she spoke much of Mr. Simpson, and called loudly on Kathleen, and as she got worse asked over and over again in low plaintive tones for her lost father and mother, whose names had never crossed her lips since first she came to live in Ryde ; but though she was ill for a long long time, and in the course of her ravings mentioned the name of nearly everyone with whom she had been at all mixed up of late, there was one person she never once mentioned, and that was Sandy Beaumont. The watchers by her bedside never heard his name.

CHAPTER XIV.

HOW PEOPLE TOOK THE NEWS.

OF course there was an inquest on Mr. Simpson's body, and of course nothing was found out at it; what could ever be known about his death indeed, unless Mlle. Flore was to be believed, for she only was by at the time. People thought what they chose about it, and she escaped scot free. It was easy enough to hear what sort of a passage the Flora had made to Cherbourg, and how they had stayed there, and how they had steered to find themselves under the lee of the Isle of Wight one cold windy afternoon, and how Mlle. Flore had been overheard by one

of the stewards, Tom Holland by name, blowing up Mr. Simpson sky-high, as was her way when she was angry. It did not come out in the giving the evidence exactly what had been the cause of quarrel between them ; but it was soon very generally known that Miss O'Grady's name had been pretty freely mentioned between them. Later on in the day Mlle. Flore had grown piteous, and moaned out he cared nothing for her, and she was cold and wretched, and would like to land and go for a walk. Then Mr. Simpson had ordered out the boat, and the two had landed at a little creek near Bonchurch, and set off walking by the path along the edge of the cliffs into Ventnor, and the men had watched them walking along, till they passed round a corner, and then for some time they had lost sight of them, till at last they heard screams, and there was Mlle. Flore running back alone and crying out how their

master had fallen over the cliff. They went round and picked up the mangled body, but dead bodies tell no tales, and Mlle. Flore swore he had fallen over, so there was nothing to do but to believe her. All this it was easy enough to hear, and nothing else was found out at the inquest, and nothing else indeed could ever be found out. He might have fallen over, or she might have pushed him over, it would be easy enough to do it; and all the sailors of the *Flora* believed she had done so, but they had no reasons to give for their belief.

Talking of the inquest has led me on to keep Lady Killowen apparently a long time in ignorance of the horrible news; but Kathleen did not act in this way, she was wiser than that. Directly Sybil left her, she went and told her mother what she had heard, and shocked though she was, Lady Killowen at once decided on her plan of

action. She would go out and pay as many morning calls as she could conveniently manage, and tell every one she saw, how that they were going to Pau almost immediately, for she could not stand the cold winds after her many winters abroad.

"I shall not appear to know anything about Mr. Simpson," she said to her daughter, "you see you have been talked of together, and people might put our going away down to that. Not many people, I daresay, have heard we are going to Pau yet, and I am more than ever determined now not to stay here a day longer than I can help," and before this useful mother got back again to luncheon, she had heard all about Mr. Simpson's sudden death, and expressed all becoming horror and astonishment. "What a comfort it is Kathleen refused him!" she exclaimed in the most natural manner possible, for she had reflected that

the acceptance had been done by word of mouth, and whenever his letters and papers were looked over by his executors, there was Kathleen's letter refusing him, waiting till the Flora came back. She wished she could have got hold of that letter, but she did not know how to set about that, and when she got home again her mind was set at ease about it, for Kathleen said at once there was nothing in it to show she had once accepted him. “I only hoped very much he did not really care for me, and was sure he would soon find somebody who would make him a much better wife, and was very sorry I had not known my own mind sooner; but anyone might think that only meant I was sorry I had ever encouraged him at all.”

“Oh, Miss O’Grady *had* refused him, had she?” said Lady Long, who was by when Lady Killowen said ‘what a comfort it was!’ and though Lady Killowen did

not then know what was in Kathleen's note, she was bold enough to say :

"Oh yes, she had refused him. Of course she could not think of such a man as that seriously for a moment. Poor wretch ! but it is very dreadful having known him at all, and Kathleen is just the sort of girl to feel it very much. I am so glad we have settled to go to Pau so soon, the change will make her forget it. But I really must go home now, there were some people I meant to see, but it has given me such a shock, I don't really feel up to it."

People talked ; they are always talking as the unhappy Mr. Simpson said, and when the Flora came round to Ryde, as she did very soon, and the steward's story got about, some people very confidently asserted that Lady Killowen had not quite stuck to the truth, and that Miss O'Grady had been engaged to Mr. Simpson at the time of his death. But

then the executors came down, and ransacked all his letters and papers, and among them they came upon Kathleen's note to him. Now I don't know really whether they had any right to read this; all I know is that they did do so, and that Teddy Long boasted he did so also, and he said it was as plain as possible that the fellow had offered to her, and then gone to Cherbourg by way of giving her time to think it over, and that she had not required any time at all, but had at once written him a very decided though civil refusal. But Teddy was a great champion of Miss O'Grady's in those days; that "doing up" her hair on the second day of the town Regatta had ever since been a great feather in his cap; besides he heard her abused more than enough at home, and that set his back up.

Ryde was getting quite empty now; there was not even a talk of another

dance, and there were no longer bands upon the pier, so people met each other much less frequently, and Lady Killowen and her daughter were less seen and less missed than they would have been earlier in the season. For Kathleen had been quite crushed for the time, and could not muster up courage to show herself about much yet, and Lady Killowen stayed a good deal at home also, and was wonderfully patient with her; for she loved her daughter very much, and in reality spoiled her more than anyone. But they paid their farewell calls quite properly before they went away, and Lady Long said she almost thought she would follow them to Pau; for Ryde was so dull in the winter, and it would be such a great inducement to her having dear Lady Killowen there, but she wondered they did not go to Rome again, they had liked that so much, had not they? That was her last little bit of spite, and

that was hardly very successful, for in the middle of her speech she remembered that Lord Killowen had died at Rome, and being a proper person she felt remorseful at having spoken so lightly to his widow of the place of his death.

So Lady Killowen and Kathleen went to Pau; but on their way they stopped some time at Paris, and there they came across a very beaming looking bride, and made the acquaintance of little Mrs. De Veux, who was just then setting forth on her wedding tour. De Veux's mouth appeared to have more difficulty in shutting even than usual, and he was altogether rather sheepish in his manner on the occasion of meeting the beautiful Miss O'Grady; but little Mrs. De Veux was anything but sheepish, and made great friends with Kathleen, chatting away most confidentially to her, and showing her the county paper which had just been sent after them, with a long account of all the

grand doings at the wedding. There Kathleen saw that Teddy Long really had been second best man, and she smiled rather bitterly, more her mother's smile than the old beaming one that had been used to shine from her large blue eyes, as she read little epitomes of the speeches at the breakfast, talking so largely of first love, and the wonderful constancy of the young people, and quoting the old saying about the course of true love never running smooth, solely in order to say something pretty about this happy exception only serving as an additional proof of the unhappy rule.

But we must not linger with Kathleen and her mother at Paris, nor go on with them to Pau, for they have passed away from our little world of Ryde, and belong to us no more. Let us come back and take one brief glimpse at Sybil Mordaunt. She was too ill to see Kathleen again before she left Ryde, and she remained ill

for a long time, but she did not die of her illness. Only when at last she began to get better of it, the doctors said she was too weak now to try her first winter in England and ordered her abroad again, and just then she heard of some old friends going out to Madeira, and they offered to take her with them. There in that many coloured "*Flor d'Oceano*" revelling in sunshine and in flowers, and seeming for ever bathed in an afternoon of idleness, there she met again with the boy Earl, and the two often talked together over their season at Ryde; so often indeed, that anyone to hear them might have thought that those were the happy old days, which Sybil would sometimes speak of with tears in her sorrowful dark eyes. And Madeira did wonders for them both.

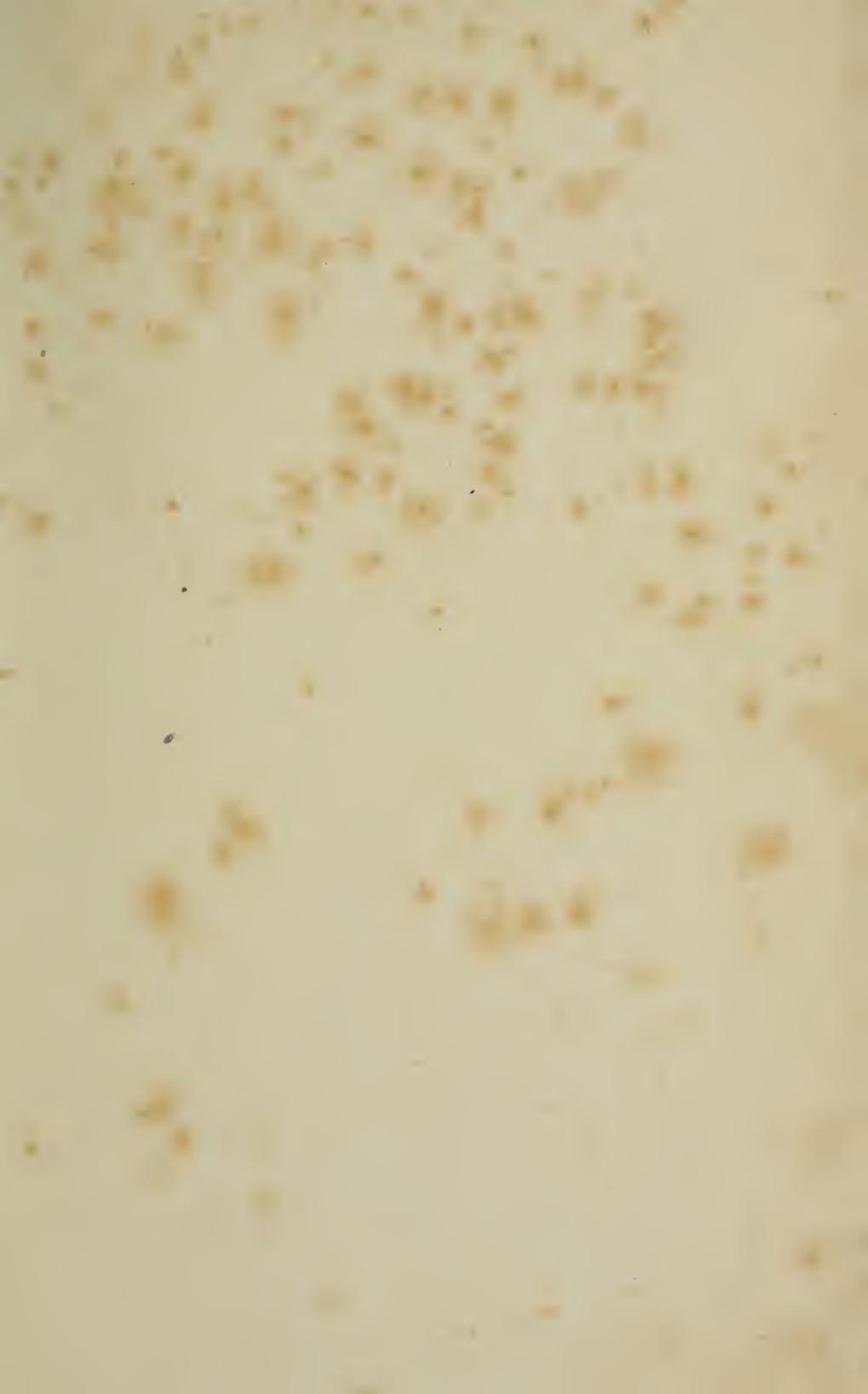
Nor did Sybil forget her promise to Sandy, though when she recovered from the delirium of illness she found that the

old delirum of feeling for him had passed away also ; she did not forget her promise, and she and Kathleen continued to be great friends, and wrote long letters to each other, though Sybil often wondered what her friend's nature could really be ; for it seemed to her that Kathleen at Pau was but beginning over again her Season at Ryde.

THE END.

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